

Gestures Towards A Better Place: Approaches To Contemporary British Fiction

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Abstract

Literary evaluation is now, more than ever, a problem for academics, researchers and students of literature. Through a focus upon novels by James Kelman and Iain Banks, I endorse selected ways of evaluating contemporary British novels and tackle a set of related, yet discrete, issues which can arise when analysing contemporary British fiction; the role and function of the British reviewing and prizewinning cultures; publishing and bookselling; the concepts of class and ideology.

I analyse current debates over literary and cultural value, noting the problems and advantages of several perspectives. Subsequently, I propose an approach which uses the concepts of ideology, class, and which involves an understanding of contemporary publishing/the literary establishment. To pursue this goal I provide an overview of novels by Banks and Kelman, and then go on to show that study of their novels can be enriched by scrutiny of:

- How they have been received and evaluated by literary critics and the literary community generally.
- The structure, ethos and commercial priorities of contemporary publishing.
- The concept of ideology and social class in contemporary Britain.
- Writings by Antonio Gramsci and Pierre Bourdieu.

My thesis also includes an extended analysis of critical reaction to Kelman's success at the 1994 Booker Prize and scrutinises the ensuing 'Booker debate'.

Theoretically I largely employ a Marxist framework, but I choose a non-dogmatic Marxism and provide a wide range of evidence to sustain my arguments including, for example, data from a commercial survey of the book-buying public.

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Abbreviations and Conventions

Baverstock	Alison Baverstock, <i>Are Books Different? Marketing In the Book Trade</i> , 1993.
Bennett	Tony Bennett, <i>Outside Literature</i> , 1990.
Billington	Rosa Billington, et al., <i>Culture and Society</i> , 1991.
Birkets	Sven Birkets, <i>The Guttenberg Elegies: The Fate Of Reading In An Electronic Age</i> , 1994.
Bloom	Harold Bloom, <i>The Western Canon</i> , 1995.
B.M.L.	Book Marketing Limited, <i>Books and The Consumer: Non-Subscribers Summary Report.</i> , 1995.
Bourdieu	Pierre Bourdieu, <i>Distinction - A Social Critique Of The Judgement Of Taste</i> , 1984.
Bradbury	Malcolm Bradbury, <i>The Modern British Novel</i> , 1994.
<i>The Bridge</i>	Iain Banks, <i>Futura</i> , 1989.
<i>The Burn</i>	James Kelman, <i>Minerva</i> , 1992.
<i>The Busconductor Hines</i>	James Kelman, <i>Polygon</i> , 1984.
Carey	John Carey, <i>The Intellectuals and The Masses: Pride and Prejudice Among The Literary Intelligentsia 1880 - 1939</i> , 1992.
<i>Complicity</i>	Iain Banks, <i>Abacus</i> , 1993.
Connor	Steven Connor, 'The 'Necessity Of Value'', <i>Principled Positions: Postmodernism and The Rediscovery Of Value</i> , ed. Judith Squires (1993), pp. 31- 49.
Craig	Cairns Craig, 'Resisting Arrest: James Kelman', <i>The Scottish Novel Since The Seventies</i> , (1993), pp. 99 - 115.
<i>The Crow Road</i>	Iain Banks, <i>Scribners</i> , 1992.
<i>Culture</i>	Raymond Williams, <i>Culture</i> , 1981.
<i>A Disaffection</i>	James Kelman, <i>Picador</i> , 1990.
Easthope	Anthony Easthope, <i>Literary Into Cultural Studies</i> , 1991.
Eagleton, <i>Literary</i>	Terry Eagleton, <i>Literary Theory: An Introduction</i> , 1983.
Eagleton, <i>Ideology</i>	Terry Eagleton, <i>Ideology</i> , 1991.
<i>Espedair Street</i>	Iain Banks, <i>Abacus</i> 1990.
Fowler, <i>Terms</i>	<i>A Dictionary Of Literary Terms</i> , ed. Roger Fowler, 2nd ed., 1987.
Fowler, 'Literature'	Roger Fowler, 'Literature', <i>Encyclopedia Of Literature and Criticism</i> , ed. Martin Coyle (1991), pp. 3 - 27.
Feather	John Feather, <i>A History Of British Publishing</i> , 1988.
Featherstone	Mike Featherstone, <i>Consumer Culture and Postmodernism</i> , 1991.
Franklin, 'Editor'	Dan Franklin, 'The Role Of The Editor', <i>Publishing Now</i> , (1993), pp. 111 - 119.
Franklin, 'Hardback'	Dan Franklin, 'The Death Of The Hardback?', <i>Publishing Now</i> , (1993), pp. 23 - 30.
[G]	Refer to Glossary.
Gramsci	Antonio Gramsci. <i>Selections From Cultural Writings</i> . Trans. Eds. David Forgacs and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith. 1985.
<i>Greyhound For Breakfast</i>	James Kelman, <i>Secker and Warburg</i> , 1987.
Grossberg	Lawrence Grossberg et al., eds., <i>Cultural Studies</i> , 1992.
Harvie	Christopher Harvie, 'Gnawing the Mammoth: History, Class and Politics in the Modern Scottish and Welsh Novel', <i>The Scottish Novel Since The Seventies</i> , eds. Gavin Wallace and Randall Stevenson (1993), pp. 170 - 187.
Hawthorn	Jeremy Hawthorn, <i>A Concise Glossary Of Contemporary Literary Theory</i> , 2nd ed., 1994.
Heath	Anthony Heath, 'The Attitudes Of The Underclass', <i>Understanding The Underclass</i> , ed. David Smith (1992), pp. 32 - 38.
Hobsbawm	Eric Hobsbawm, <i>Age Of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914 - 1991</i> , 1994.
Hoggart	Richard Hoggart, <i>The Way We Live Now</i> , 1995.
<i>How Late It Was, How Late</i>	Kelman, <i>Secker and Warburg</i> , 1994.

Marx <i>Contribution</i>	Karl Marx, <i>A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy</i> , 1964.
Marx <i>Ideology</i>	Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, <i>The German Ideology</i> , 1970.
McGuigan	Jim McGuigan, <i>Culture and The Public Sphere</i> , 1996.
Miller	Karl Miller, <i>Authors</i> , 1990.
Mulhern, 'Introduction'	Francis Mulhern, Introduction, <i>Contemporary Marxist Literary Theory</i> , ed. Francis Mulhern, (1992), pp. 1 - 33.
Mulhern, 'Culture'	Francis Mulhern, 'Culture and authority', <i>Critical Quarterly</i> , Vol. 37, (Spring 1995), pp. 76 - 90.
Nairn	Thom Nairn, 'Iain Banks and the Fiction Factory', <i>The Scottish Novel Since The Seventies</i> , eds. Gavin Wallace and Randall Stevenson, (1993), pp. 127 - 135.
Norris	Christopher Norris, 'Truth science and the growth of knowledge', <i>New Left Review</i> , (March/April 1995) pp. 105 - 123.
<i>Not Not While The Giro</i>	James Kelman, <i>Not Not While The Giro and Other Stories</i> , Polygon, 1983.
Orwell, 'Best-sellers'	Review Of <i>Best-Sellers</i> by George Stevens and Stanley Unwin, <i>The Adelphi</i> , Sep. 1939, <i>The Complete Works Of George Orwell</i> , ed. Peter Davison, (1998), xi, pp. 407 - 409.
Orwell, 'Proletarian'	George Orwell and Desmond Hawkins, 'The proletarian writer', <i>The Listener</i> , 19 December 1940, <i>The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters Of George Orwell</i> , eds. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus, (1968), ii, pp. 38 - 44.
<i>Publishing Now</i>	<i>Publishing Now: A Definitive Assessment By Key People In The Book Trade</i> , ed. Peter Owen, 1993.
Savage	Mike Savage, 'Class analysis and social research', <i>Social Change and The Middle Classes</i> , eds. Mike Savage and Andrew Miles, (1995), pp. 15 - 30.
Smith	David Smith, 'Defining the underclass', <i>Understanding The Underclass</i> , ed. David Smith, (1992), pp. 3 - 9.
<i>Some Recent Attacks</i>	James Kelman, <i>Some Recent Attacks: Essays Cultural and Political</i> , 1992.
Stevenson	Randall Stevenson, <i>A Reader's Guide To The Twentieth-Century Novel In Britain</i> , 1993.
Storey, <i>Introductory</i>	John Storey, <i>An Introductory Guide To Cultural Theory and Popular Culture</i> , 1993.
Storey, <i>Cultural</i>	John Storey, <i>Cultural Studies and The Study Of Popular Culture</i> , 1996.
Sutherland, 'Production'	John Sutherland, 'Production and Reception of the Literary Book', <i>Encyclopedia of Literature and Criticism</i> , ed. Martin Coyle et al., 1991.
Sutherland, 'Binarisms'	John Sutherland, 'Binarisms' rev. of <i>Complicity and Against a Dark Background</i> by Iain Banks, <i>London Review Of Books</i> , 18 Nov. (1993), pp. 24 - 25.
Strauss	Peter Strauss, 'Format', <i>Publishing Now</i> , ed. Peter Owen, (1993), pp. 57 - 64.
Todd	Richard Todd, <i>Consuming Fictions: The Booker Prize and Fiction in Britain Today</i> , 1996.
<i>The Wasp Factory</i>	Iain Banks, Abacus, 1990.
<i>Walking On Glass</i>	Iain Banks, Abacus, 1990.
Waugh	Patricia Waugh, <i>Harvest Of the Sixties: English Literature and Its Background 1960 to 1990</i> , 1995.
Widdowson	Peter Widdowson, 'W(h)ither English', <i>Encyclopedia of Literature and Criticism</i> , ed. Martin Coyle et al., 1991.
Willison	Willison, I. R., 'Remarks on the History Of The Book in Britain as a Field of Study within the Humanities, With a Synopsis and Select list of Current Literature', <i>Library Chronicle of The University of Texas at Austin</i> , Vol. 21, No. 3/4 (1991), pp. 95 - 145.
Worpole	Ken Worpole, <i>Reading By Numbers</i> , 1984.

Introduction: The Values Of Disaffection

In his account of modern drama Robert Brustein, sums up his thesis by invoking an image of revolt and disaffection. He asks readers to imagine:

...a perfectly level plain in a desolate land. In the foreground, an uneasy crowd of citizens huddle together on the ruins of an ancient temple. Beyond them, a broken altar, bristling artifacts. Beyond that empty space. An emancipated priest in disreputable garments stands before the ruined altar, level with the crowd, glancing into a distorting mirror. He cavorts grotesquely before it, inspecting his own image in several outlandish positions. The crowd mutters ominously and partially disperses...¹

Brustein's metaphor has a remarkable resemblance to the state of contemporary literary studies and literary criticism. Some critics like Easthope, and Milner, argue that literary studies should be absorbed into cultural studies.² Eagleton, argues that literary studies should disavow itself of an elitist history and become an intensely politicised domain of enquiry.³ Others like Harold Bloom, in the light of intense academic debates within the American academic establishment, foresee a reinvigorated 'Classics' replacing the self-denigrating, and as he sees it, incoherent literary studies.⁴ Clive Bloom sums up the mood of perpetual crisis which has invaded the humanities in general, but most particularly the literary humanities, with a phrase in the title of his article: 'Critical Breakdown'.⁵ Widdowson calls on the same nuclear imagery in his assessment of the state of literary studies:

The last decades have seen an unprecedented melt-down at the core of an academic discipline which by the mid-twentieth-century had achieved a status and a popularity in secondary and tertiary education second to none. ⁶

In short there is some kind of common understanding, if not unequivocal agreement, that literary studies is in crisis, and I believe that Brustein's metaphor can also indicate why this perception is so widespread.

Brustein's metaphor sums up an image of a culture in which cultural values and evaluation are on the point of collapse and it is my thesis that the ferment within literary studies and literary criticism are inseparable from a more general fragmentation within cultural values and evaluation. Therefore, a key objective of this thesis is to investigate the idea of literary value, and the practice of literary evaluation within a broader cultural context. This leads to the second aim of my thesis: an apparent collapse in the self-confidence of any discipline is, in some senses, as real as an actual institutional collapse. This is because the guidelines for research and evaluation disappear, or are fragmented. In such circumstances evaluating a theoretical method becomes increasingly difficult but, paradoxically, more important. A collapse in valuation also potentially involves a collapse in methods for approaching literature, so far as literary studies are concerned.

Therefore my thesis is deeply concerned with both the means of understanding any possible fragmentation within cultural evaluation, as well as the means for contributing to new methods of approaching contemporary novels. I analyse the novels, critical reception and careers of two contemporary novelists, James Kelman and Iain Banks, and then relate the findings of this analysis to ways of approaching contemporary novels theoretically, as well as assess the problem of evaluation itself as perceived within literary criticism and literary studies. This is the subject of my first chapter, but I address this objective throughout.

As this description infers, my primary goal is practical assessment. Literary critics have frequently claimed that literary theory either evades reality, or is irrelevant.⁷ Although I shall be working primarily within a Marxist framework, I will subject Marxist methodologies to rational enquiry and demonstrate that some current methods can be productive for analysing contemporary novels. Above all I mean to be pragmatic and provide accessible routes for literary study. This aim is more radical than it seems.

One of the perennial concerns of many, but unfortunately not all, academics within literary studies has been the relevance of the discipline within a contemporary society increasingly dominated by the electronic media, the sound-bite, and voracious consumption of consumer goods. I think that it is no coincidence that the perception of a 'crisis' within the literary humanities has increasingly taken hold since the 1950s. Hobsbawm, while speaking with regret at what he sees as the decline in literate culture (a thesis by itself) concludes that the fate of 'the living arts' in the next century is obscure until their role and value is re-established in western societies in which they currently seem increasingly superfluous or anachronistic.⁸ Clive Bloom, goes further, and describes the current archaic, 'museum culture' role of the humanities in the commodified 'heritage-centre culture'. He describes a consumer society in which literary studies has become an eminently marketable, but fundamentally backward looking, discipline.⁹ This is one of my reasons for focusing on the contemporary within my thesis.

In Chapter Two I shall analyse novels by two writers who began their careers, and published their first novels, after 1979. This is the definition of contemporary which I shall hold to, although it does not preclude looking at writers who began writing before 1979 or academic writings prior to 1979, and I am aware that contemporary holds the expansive meaning of living or existing in the same time. The idea of the contemporary and practical aims collude in another way in this thesis. As a rubric, '1979', holds a particular practical force. Novels by Kelman and Banks engage with a British society which has seemed to alter its direction in the late 1970s, and along with other writers, they contest its moral and political terms. This also has some bearing on explanations for the perceived crisis within literary studies and the Humanities generally, because one explanation for the current crisis of cultural valuation which I explore in the conclusion to this thesis, posits a link between the appearance of relative forms of thinking and periods of rapid social and economic change. Another factor in favour of choosing 1979 as a historical parameter concerns publishing.

In Chapter Four, I assess changes within publishing in Britain since 1979 and find that the 1980s saw substantive accelerations in processes of

change within the industry, particularly in terms of ethos and ownership. Contrary to pessimistic predictions, this did not entail the disappearance of 'quality' fiction publishing or publishers.¹⁰ Fiction publishing as an activity simultaneously 'conglomerated and proliferated'.¹¹ That is, general publishers increasingly monopolised general fiction publishing, while smaller publishers catered for an increase in niches within the 'quality' fiction market. It was also the case that medium-sized British publishers were swallowed up by multi-media conglomerates in which publishing, as an activity, was simply one part.

While researching for this thesis, I discovered that publishing and bookselling, as well as the 'history of the book', are substantial areas of ongoing academic research. This has included the launching of a number of collaborative national histories of the book: in Germany, in the United States, in France and in Britain.¹² Contemporary publishing has also been the focus of renewed academic interest. In Chapter Four, I assess contemporary publishing and bookselling practices within the light of this developing area of academic research and interest. This also stems from my focus on the contemporary, in this case, about the state of economic and institutional conditions in which contemporary novels are published and marketed.

My concern here, once again, is to establish the viability of this method. With this limited aim in mind I seek to address the problem of how study of what Storey calls 'political economy' can inform study of the contemporary novel.¹³ As Sutherland remarks, one problem which has plagued studies of publishing is the difficulty of relating sometimes complex historical or empirical data with the study of the content of a novel, play or poem.¹⁴ I mean to shed some light on this methodological problem, as well offer possible solutions. One argument available immediately, is that Sutherland's question simply reflects back upon the broader question of how relevant literary studies are within the kind of contemporary society to which Bloom and Hobsbawm draw attention. My solution is to argue for a broad approach which perceives the novel and other literary forms (the play, the poem) as a particular type of commodity in contemporary

industrialised societies, a commodity which has its own particular history of capitalist entrepreneurship (publishers),¹⁵ its own apparatus of quality control (critics and reviewers), and which has been used historically to uphold ideas which have served a cultural hegemony. One of these ideas is that certain types of novels and their writers are outside the economic and political spheres and that these novels embody Literature with a capital L.¹⁶ In a society in which so much is patently reduced to its economic value, the political values of such a move are obvious; I shall reject this view throughout my thesis.

I stress that my approach has been defined by scrutiny of the novels, public pronouncements, and critical reception given to Banks and Kelman. In terms of theory, their public pronouncements, careers, and content of their novels has, to some extent, generated the theoretical approaches and issues with which this thesis engages. Kelman, has for example, consistently addressed the issues of power and social class in relation to literature. His non-fictional *Some Recent Attacks: Essays Cultural and Political* is a polemical attack upon the elitist credentials of what he calls 'Eng. Lit.' and asserts a connection between dominant cultural values and the class system.¹⁷ Banks has challenged the generic division between 'quality' literary fiction and 'low quality' generic fiction. In this way he can be seen to be drawing attention to the economic as well as cultural conditions in which his own, as well as other contemporary, novels are published, and to the operation of literary value through generic distinctions.

Here is part of the reason why my research analyses the structure and practices of the contemporary British publishing and bookselling industries: I assess how practices within publishing and book distribution might reinforce the distinctions between 'quality' literary fiction and 'low quality' generic fiction. In Chapter Five, debates within sociology and cultural studies about the general relevance of class within contemporary societies, are addressed through novels by Kelman and Banks, asking what they can disclose about class in contemporary British society. Within his novels Banks has also, with other contemporary writers such as J.G. Ballard and Irvine Welsh, focused on the issue of literary consumption in contemporary

western societies and about the relationship between class and consumption generally.¹⁸ This is tackled in Appendix B, where I assess the class composition of the British reading-public using data from a commercial survey.

Kelman and Banks therefore engage fundamentally with the issues which I have set out in this introduction: cultural evaluation, the role and study of literature within a society dominated by consumption, and the relationship between literature and forms of power. Both writers urge their readers to consider the issue of literary value as fundamental to the social and economic structure of contemporary British society. Their advice is reflected in the structure and parameters of this study. Because Marxism has a rich tradition of thought on the phenomena of consumption, and the relationship between literature and socio-economic power, I assess some recent Marxist, as well as non-Marxist approaches.

Fictional writings by Banks and Kelman also demonstrate the ability of the contemporary novel to engage with substantive political and cultural issues. In this sense the contemporary British novel can be seen to be different from other commodities and this has bearing for my method of analysing the novel as a commodity. As Storey, points out, one inherent danger in a focus on the economic basis of cultural forms is to argue that their involvement in capitalist production determines the political and social meanings that they carry.¹⁹ I concur. As I show in Chapter Two, novels by Banks and Kelman, as well as their public pronouncements as authors, can hardly be regarded as supporting, or a reflection of, capitalist ideology. But this touches on a broader element which must be present in any sensitive evaluation of literary forms. It would also be an act of academic arrogance as well as patently unrealistic to dismiss all past and present notions and accounts of literature as mere ideological reflections of some dominant social order or group. It would be arrogant, because it fails to take account of the widespread emotional commitment that novels, plays and poems can still capture at the end of the twentieth-century. Such emotional commitment is implied by Eagleton, in his polemical account of the history of literary theory. In a rejection of the view that literary theory can be free from political

or ideological colourings he comments:

For any body of theory concerned with human meaning, value, language, feeling and experience will inevitably engage with broader, deeper beliefs about the nature of human individuals and societies, problems of power and sexuality... 20

My solution to the potential problem which Storey identifies, is to stress that novels have a complex symbolic or ideological dimension as well as an economic dimension.²¹ Novels are commodities but they are commodities which can urge their readers to laugh at, sneer at, or attack, the values of the dominant social and economic system within which they are sold as commodities. Novels by Banks and Kelman do just this. In the following thesis, I therefore explore how attention to both economic and symbolic dimensions can shed light on the novels, (Chapter Two); critical reception (Chapter Three); and marketing of my chosen novelists (Chapter Four). My approach also has wider relevance for the debate over cultural value which I outlined at the beginning of this introduction.

E.P. Thompson in a retrospect on his career as a Marxist historian, and on Marxist accounts of history generally, argues that a significant failing of such approaches has been an insufficient vocabulary for examining the 'structure of power relations through symbolism' and argues that Marxism must concern itself increasingly with 'finding the rationality of social unreason'.²² If it is accepted that Literature with a capital L does not, indeed cannot, exist rationally, but that notions of literary value might serve to cement dominant social and economic forces, then this does not, in any way, preclude rational enquiry into the domain of literature, that is literature without adopting the elitist, universalist capital L. Rather, this is perfectly in keeping with the kind of enquiry which E.P. Thompson recommends for future research by Marxist historians. Identifying what Williams called the 'structure of feeling' does not preclude rational, sociological enquiry into the political, social or economic dimensions of this 'structure of feeling'.²³ Indeed it is arguably all the more important at this point in the history of the Humanities. This is the central argument of Chapter One where I examine recent debates over literary evaluation.

Such an approach is necessary because the mark of what Thompson dubs the 'rationality of social unreason' can be seen in some quarters of the debate over cultural value. Connor, perceptively argues that the debate has spawned two negative tendencies. The first general tendency recognised by Connor, and embodied by Bloom, is a return to absolute forms of value.²⁴ Bloom exemplifies this return by a call that literary studies should rename itself 'Classics' and pay renewed attention to the great and good of literature, particularly the works of William Shakespeare.²⁵

The second tendency, typified by Easthope, embraces cultural relativism: all cultural values are relative, and literary value becomes a function of 'reader-text relationships' which according to Easthope are produced 'transhistorically' by previous interpretations.²⁶ He recommends, consequently, that literary studies should relocate itself within cultural studies and under the umbrella term of 'signifying practices'. I will examine both Bloom and Easthope's accounts in more detail in Chapter One. As I have already hinted, study of the novels, critical reception and careers of Banks and Kelman implicitly rejects both the relativist and absolutist cases, but it is important that I outline my main disciplinary objections to these approaches.

Simply refusing the validity of such symbolic constructs as Nation, Common Sense and Literature does not aid understanding of how each has been, or can be mobilised for specific political aims. Rather it smacks of an irrational, practically impotent political posturing. These are my main accusations against Easthope, and I demonstrate their validity when I focus on his inadequate analysis of literary value. At the other extreme, Harold Bloom's call for a return to reverential study of Shakespeare and advocacy of the Classics, is unlikely to be accepted by many working within literary studies. As Milner points out, It is more likely to fuel already existing perceptions that literary studies is based upon conservative and politically unacceptable foundations. Furthermore, it leaves the way open for arbitrary, irrational, and possibly dictatorial, decisions about which up-and-coming novelist, playwright or poet deserves to be studied alongside those already within the canon. I do not believe that this decision should be at the mercy of

whoever has the loudest voice, or the greatest clout, within the university department. Nor, in light of Chapter Four, do I believe that academics wholly decide what has literary merit: publishers, booksellers, and the literary media, have an important role in influencing this perception. Bloom, therefore not only proposes an agenda which would lead to serious dissent within literary studies were it ever accepted, but he is also mistakenly idealistic about the processes of canonical selection.

One thing this book is *not* is a general survey/study of contemporary British fiction over the last few years. There are many reasons for this, though mainly, in has to be said, my desire to do full justice to writings by Kelman and Banks rather than fit them into a general examination of the British literary scene. In writing this book I was always conscious of the danger that I might produce a generalised, unfocused, theme-generated, never-ending, open-ended look at contemporary British fiction. I think focusing, mainly, on two writers adds to my claims for the approaches offered, especially when it is considered that both were originally chosen on account of my interests rather than with any programmatic study in mind. Also, I am aware of just how taxing some of the theoretical approaches I use are. Academics, in my opinion, sometimes forget that their language (theoretical, technical, professional), can act as a powerful barrier to wider debate, and prevent the dissemination of their ideas to a more varied audience (wider than is than the last conference on theory which they attended). I make no apology for attempting, in this book, to strike a balance between the need for theoretical language/approaches and the need for a text which is of potential interest to a non-specialist, or student, reader.

Endnotes

- ¹ Robert Brustein, *The Theatre Of Revolt: An Approach To Modern Drama* (London: Methuen, 1965), p. 1.
- ² Easthope, p. 174; Milner, p. 25.
- ³ Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 180.
- ⁴ Bloom, p. 519.
- ⁵ Clive Bloom, 'Vanishing Point: On the Edge Of Critical Breakdown', *The British Critical Tradition: A Re-evaluation*, ed. Gary Day (London: Macmillan, 1993), pp. 238-243.
- ⁶ Widdowson, p. 1221.
- ⁷ John Gross, *The Rise and Fall Of The Man Of Letters: English Literary Life Since 1800*, 2nd ed. (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 237.
- ⁸ Hobsbawm, p. 241.
- ⁹ Bloom, p. 241.
- ¹⁰ Per Gedin, 'The Book Market', *The New Pelican Guide To English Literature 8. The Present Day: From Orwell To Naipaul* ed. Boris Ford, 2nd ed. (London: Penguin, 1990) p. 408.
- ¹¹ *Publishing Now*, p. 14.
- ¹² Willison, p. 95.
- ¹³ Storey, *Introductory*, p. 95.
- ¹⁴ Sutherland, 'Production', p. 816.
- ¹⁵ Feather, p. vii.
- ¹⁶ Eagleton, *Literary*, p. 16.
- ¹⁷ *Some Recent Attacks*, p. 45.
- ¹⁸ See the introduction to J. G Ballard's *Crash*, pp. 3 -7.
- ¹⁹ Storey, *Introductory*, p. 96.
- ²⁰ Eagleton, *Literary*, p. 195.
- ²¹ Storey, *Introductory*, p. 96.
- ²² E. P. Thompson, 'Agenda for Radical History', *Critical Enquiry*, Winter 1995, Vol. 21, No. 2, p. 303.
- ²³ Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), p. 64.
- ²⁴ Connor, p. 32.
- ²⁵ Bloom, p. 10.
- ²⁶ Easthope, p. 59.

Chapter 1

The Value Debate: Fragmentation, Retrenchment and Renewal

Debates Over Cultural Evaluation: An Overview

In an inaugural lecture at Middlesex University in 1994, Francis Mulhern told his audience:

Today English Studies are in a profoundly unsettled state. I find it impossible to phrase a clear empirical generalisation about the current situation, or to offer a confident forecast. ¹

One measure of this disciplinary disorder, can be revealed by the negatives which are now attached to literary study within higher education. For example, study of literature no longer constitutes the study of English Literature. As Widdowson points out, literary study has become 'a global phenomena'.² This has meant that the essential nationalistic basis of the discipline in the past, has been transplanted into a variety of evolving national traditions, where a corpus of texts from English literature are studied, for example, alongside Canadian, Irish, Australian, Pacific or American literature.³ Within English universities themselves, the label 'Department of English Literature' has occasionally been retained, though usually in contradiction to the wide range of texts studied under its banner.⁴ More often, the department of English Literature has changed into the department of Literary Studies, Critical Studies, Cultural Studies, or simply Literature. The lack of a common departmental title indicates a lack of agreement about the aims and objectives of literary study.

Contemporary academics are also keen to point out that literary study is not actually a discipline at all. On the political right, some such as Bloom deny that studying literature could ever be a discipline because it relies upon emotional rather than rational foundations.⁵ Others, usually on the political left, point to the 'cultivated theoretical inarticulacy' which underpinned

literary study from its Victorian origins.⁶ Historical study of the discipline has pointed to its origins as a 'civilising' force promoting 'conceptions of English culture through a social system which was felt to be increasingly fragmented and culturally dispersed' or as a means of promoting a culturally dominant 'liberal bourgeois ideology,' about 'the supremacy of the individual human subject.'⁷

It has also become a commonplace to observe that literary study does not actually analyse literature.⁸ This reasoning frequently relies on two premises. Firstly, as Fowler argues, the category of Literature (as signified with an upper-case L) does not exist in any objective sense.⁹ Secondly, literary study, it is argued, does not actually study literature because there has been a collapse for many people in the idea of how valuable texts might be identified, and more radically in the very idea of evaluation itself.¹⁰

Yet paradoxically, as Fowler points out by reference to titles such as Terry Eagleton's *Literary Theory: An Introduction* :

The books themselves may interrogate such expressions...however, people in this field know what the phrases mean, have an idea what kinds of books such titles indicate when they are encountered on the P.N. shelves of a university library.¹¹

Connor and Guillory remark how evaluation and valuation are routinised everyday activities in people's social and cultural lives.¹² As I show in Chapter Four, booksellers, publishers and the literary media relied on perceptions of literary value when successfully promoting 'quality', highbrow, or literary fiction during the 1980s. The commercial aspects of the literary scene were reorganised by reference to notions of literary value and an implicit hierarchy of quality. As I demonstrate in Chapter Three, Kelman has beliefs as to what kind of contemporary literature is important and valuable. These convictions have informed the kind of audience which his fiction seeks to address, as well as his conduct at the 1994 Booker Prize. In this thesis I also show how Iain Banks's novels designedly disrupt the distinction between 'lowbrow' commercial fiction and 'highbrow' literary

fiction for political effect. Clearly, this strategy presupposes that such value systems actually exist and that they are, in Banks's estimation, politically and culturally negative.

The thrust of much contemporary literary criticism therefore, seems to be based on a form of doublethink. While prominent literary academics establish that 'literature' and literary evaluation is premised upon 'bourgeois',¹³ 'eurocentric',¹⁴ or 'patriarchal',¹⁵ ideologies most academics continue, like everybody else, to practice some form of literary evaluation and acknowledge literature in their daily professional lives. It is also clear that few literary academics would wish to reject some notion of 'the literary' and regard everything as text.¹⁶ Notions of literary value and a faith in some, usually undisclosed, form of literary discrimination have proved to be almost impossible to dislodge.¹⁷ The result is that the whole issue of literary evaluation ends up as a hidden, but extremely potent source of contradiction and paradox. It is significant, for example, that even rigorous and politicised writers such as Terry Eagleton, have been unable to exorcise notions of quality. The result, as Milner correctly observes with regard to Eagleton, is that a more traditional academic prejudice towards commercial, generic fiction is recast in terms of theory and the argument that there are those texts which are 'significant' and those which simply 'signify'.¹⁸

In light of these contradictions between academic practice and between claims made by literary theory, some writers have questioned the cultural role of the university. Radway, for example, argues that the structure of the university plays out what she calls the 'Great Divide', promoting a distinction between serious edification and frivolous fun.¹⁹ She argues that this distinction socially reproduces the binarisms of, 'work and play, knowledge and ignorance, culture and entertainment'. Furthermore, Radway connects these ingrained divisions to the reason why literary intellectuals have been unable to abandon evaluation and she goes on to mount an iconoclastic criticism of 'radicals' within the humanities:

The talk of 'quality' thus recurs as the figure, or trope of our own role as cultural missionaries, of our participation in the

hegemonic business of the constructing the serious even when we present ourselves as literary intellectuals challenging the domination of bourgeois capitalists.²⁰

Radway, then, casts a cynical eye over current debates over cultural evaluation, and emphasising the political-cultural pretensions of radical intellectuals has proved to be a popular explanation for the current 'unsettled' state of literary study and literary theory.

Willison, notes how the 1980s saw the development of various 'deromanticized' concepts of how texts and ideas of value are produced.²¹ The writings of Pierre Bourdieu figure in Willison's analysis, and Bourdieu's accounts of cultural production/consumption employ a sophisticated theoretical framework aimed at showing how the intelligentsia, and other class fractions, produce literary value for class-cultural 'distinction.'²² [G] Less subtly, Fromm draws attention to what he contends are the 'shabby and hypocritical performances of many contemporary critic-theorists' and argues that their 'pseudo-revolutionary virtue' belies their real agenda, which is 'power and success in the academy'.²³

There may be some truth in this interpretation of current debates about literary evaluation and the unsettled state of literary study. One notable tendency in debates about literary evaluation and within literary theory is the extent to which theoretical or ethical arguments slip into arguments about the need for a 'socialist pedagogy', multicultural curriculum or extended canon. Arguments over literary or cultural evaluation rapidly transform into proposals for curricula design or other demonstrations of managerial vision, which are much prized in an increasingly professionalised and market-driven higher education.

But in a sense this iconoclastic interpretation actually demeans the important and relevant issues which the debate raises. For example, and simply in relation to my thesis, how can contemporary British novelists be evaluated when there is utter disarray about how to judge and value literature in a wider sense? Furthermore, how can arguments that literature is a 'bourgeois' or 'patriarchal' construct be squared with a booming trade

in 'literary' fiction? Are radical, or socialist, contemporary British novelists like Kelman and Banks, politically misguided when they disclose a faith in some form of the literary?

There is also an important connection between radical interpretations of debates over literary evaluation, and a wider disaffection within the humanities. Hawkins notes how the early 1980s saw the sudden appearance of a radical debate within British higher education about cultural evaluation and reform of the literary curriculum.²⁴ In striking parallel, Höhendahl notes a moment of disaffection within West German literary criticism which surfaced during the late 1970s and early 1980s. In common with Hawkins he draws attention to the radicalism of the debate:

It is worth noting that 'the outsiders' who are attacking do not direct their polemic merely against the conservative modes of West German literary criticism. They do not seek to replace certain outdated norms of taste with others. Rather, they are attacking the methodology of criticism in general, the creation and use of standards and norms of all types.²⁵

Höhendahl's analysis also perfectly describes the disaffection and scepticism integral to the growth of post-modernist and post-structuralist sensibilities. [G] Radway's cynicism about the cultural role of intellectuals in the university has changed, within some quarters, into a more fundamentalist skepticism regarding the way in which knowledge is produced and appraised.

The writings of Jacques Derrida are an example of this view and have been influential in its development. He contends that meaning cannot be pinned down or finalised without recourse to some 'transcendental signifier' and Derrida describes his overall intellectual career as an attempt to 'systematise a deconstructive critique precisely against the authority of meaning'.²⁶ In the philosophy of science claims are made that the idea of scientific progress is a mythology and that science is just one 'among a range of incommensurate language games,' and 'no longer exerts any privileged claim in respect of knowledge or truth.'²⁷

Following the influential writings of Michel Foucault, literary critics claim that literary history, along with any other kind of history, exists, 'not as set of real past events,' but as a 'particularly socially organised zone of representation existing within the present'.²⁸ Bennett, who relies on the theories of Foucault for this view, goes on to argue that discourse and ideological practices produce the experience of reality with the consequence that economic and social relations cannot be 'posited as existing independently,' but rather as relative to the way in which they are represented by and through discourse.²⁹

One asset of post-structuralist and post-modernist thinking, some might say the only saving grace, is a capability for comic paradox. For example, if Bennett's claims are taken seriously then they would, as he contends, mean the end of Marxism, or indeed any strain of thought which relies on the idea that social and economic relations have some objective existence outside the way in which they are represented by language, discourse or texts.³⁰ The comic contradiction here, however, is that some measure of objective evaluation would be required to confirm this post-structuralist claim.³¹

Furthermore, as Norris points out, the fundamental problem of accepting any relativist doctrine resides in deciding what ever could be counted as blatantly false. If history is produced by discourses which are relative to the community, society, or institution which produces them then as Norris argues: 'there is no way of counting any belief false just so long as it can claim - or once could claim - some measure of communal assent'.³² A political consequence of this logical inconsistency is that there is no way for 'radical' literary intellectuals, such as Bennett, to reject what they might regard as sexist, racist, or hegemonic literature, or attitudes, within literary study: all beliefs are equally valid under the porch of relativism. Ironically, in light of his own account, Bennett criticises some currents of post-modernism for their political impotency and relativism, their alleged: 'exultation in the pleasures of a free-wheeling relativism'.³³

Deconstruction, post-structuralism, or any other species of relativist doctrine

represents the final terminus when valuation is violently rejected.³⁴ It is significant, that both of these forms of relativist doctrine largely originated within literary study before moving outwards to make claims on history, sociology, science and other disciplines.³⁵ Laquer notes this expansion of relativist intellectual authority, and describes it as a form of gross intellectual arrogance. He comments: 'These students of English literature tend to refer to 'late capitalism', but they are not experts in economic history, let alone physics, advanced mathematics and molecular biology'. Laquer sarcastically adds, 'yet some of them have been writing on these topics confidently'.³⁶

Laquer's highly critical, not to say sarcastic, tone is indicative of an increasing backlash against relativism, both in current debates over cultural or literary evaluation, as well as more generally within the humanities.³⁷ Among the British political left there are claims that cultural relativism reinforces the dominant forces which underpin contemporary capitalist society.³⁸ Right-wing 'cultural restorationists' argue for a return to traditional cultural and literary valuation, contending that this will offset the ethical relativism and moral decline of British society.³⁹ Other critics and critical accounts perceive fragmentation within the wider Anglo-Saxon culture and call for a return to cultural absolutism: a system of norms where literary value and valuation are assured.⁴⁰ Connor describes the 'depressing' predictability of these calls for a return to absolute and stable forms of cultural evaluation which characterise current debates over cultural evaluation.⁴¹

In the following portion of this chapter I analyse three recent accounts in this most recent phase of a renewed interest in literary-cultural value, respectively: *The Western Canon* by Harold Bloom; *Literary Into Cultural Studies* by Anthony Easthope; and *The Way We Live Now* by Richard Hoggart. My examination is focused on the practical need to evaluate novels by Banks and Kelman, but I also take this as an opportunity to argue that literary study needs to be based within a rational, systematic and intellectually coherent framework. A non-dogmatic Marxist perspective epitomises this approach. This perspective is fundamental to my thesis and

it informs my decisions to examine Kelman's and Banks's novels in light of the structure and practices of contemporary publishing, and also through the prism of class and ideology. My argument is that Bloom's call for a return to absolute standards of literary evaluation, and Easthope's 'pick and mix' relativism, detract from the kind of literary study which is explanatory, rational and systematic.

A Return To Absolutism?

The Western Canon, by Harold Bloom, is a substantial contribution to the debate over literary value. Its sheer physical size emphasises the grand ambitions of the book - over five-hundred pages of text and fifty-nine pages of 'Appendix' in which Bloom outlines what constitutes the full western canon of literature. This sense of wide historical, as well as intellectual, scope is focused for readers during the first sentence, where Bloom argues that his book 'studies twenty-six writers' in order to 'isolate those qualities which made these authors canonical, that is, authoritative in our culture, he continues: "Aesthetic value" is sometimes regarded as a suggestion of Immanuel Kant's rather than an actuality, but that has not been my experience during a lifetime of reading.' ⁴²

Throughout his book Bloom emphasises that his personal experience acts as a guarantee of his arguments, and this is apparent in the Appendix. Bloom's reading tastes are eclectic and he encourages readers to consider a long list of literature from which he has 'drawn particular pleasure and insight' ranging from *The Koran* to John Updike's *The Witches Of Eastwick*.⁴³ In this sense readers might conclude that *The Western Canon* supports a liberal or multicultural perspective: a world literature rather than a western canon of literary excellence. This is far from the case.

The catholic recommendations of the 'Appendix' are carefully qualified. For example, Bloom is explicit that he has only included some Sanskrit literature from ancient India to the extent that they have influenced the western canon. Upholding and protecting the integrity of what he perceives

as the western canon is at the core of Bloom's book, and, as I will show, it is in pursuit of this goal that he eventually reveals himself to be a tyrant rather than a romantic liberal.

Bloom is insistent that his catalogue of all that is good and true in western literature is aimed to counteract a deplorable decline in Higher Education or 'our current squalors' as he puts it.⁴⁴ *The Western Canon* dubs all those who attack the canon as 'The School Of Resentment' and although Bloom, paradoxically, argues that he has 'no interest' in 'mimic cultural wars' he reserves his severest censure for 'the professors of hip-hop', 'clones of Gallic-Germanic theory', 'ideologues of gender and of various sexual persuasions' and 'multiculturalists unlimited.'⁴⁵ *The Western Canon* is therefore slightly insincere even within its own terms, because its author is determined to present the debate(s) over cultural values one-sidedly. Bloom argues that 'The School Of Resentment' threatens 'the Balkanisation' of literary studies and he offers himself and his canonical recommendations as a kind of romantic redoubt in the face of this anarchy within 'the learned world.'⁴⁶

But Bloom does not simply argue for the continued authority of his twenty-six key writers, an authority which he insists is borne out by his personal experience over a lifetime of reading, rather, *The Western Canon* conducts a full-scale counter-attack upon what he perceives as the enemies of the canon. In this very important sense, *The Western Canon* is deeply, irrevocably, involved in the very cultural wars which Bloom professes disinterest; a disinterest which actually masks an extremely partisan and political contribution to debates over literary value. This is only one of several paradoxes which mark Bloom's account.

Readers are faced with the argument that literary criticism can only be properly conducted from the strictly subjective response of the individual critic and that political objectives are antithetical to critical practice. Bloom is insistent that 'the only method is the self' and that:

criticism is therefore a branch of wisdom literature. It is not a political or social science or a cult of gender or racial

Furthermore, Bloom singles out Dr Samuel Johnson as the epitome of good criticism because he 'confronts greatness with a total response, to which he brings his complete self.'⁴⁸ But, this raises an awkward question which tends to undermine Bloom's conception of literary 'methodology' and reveals it for the mystical nonsense which it is: what if a literary critic, or a writer, also has strong political beliefs? Surely a 'total response' to a play poem or novel from the aforesaid literary critic or writer is bound to also be a political response, otherwise how can a 'complete self' be brought into the business of appreciating literature?

As Kermode shows in his discussion of American and English writing in the 1930s, there were plenty of politically-committed cultural critics and writers who refused to separate their political beliefs from writing or reviewing literature.⁴⁹ Indeed, Bloom includes George Orwell's *Collected Essays* in his list of recommended literature. Orwell was an extremely political literary critic and writer. It is very difficult to read a novel like *1984*, or a fairy story like *Animal Farm*, or indeed, many of his non-fictional writings without getting a sense of Orwell's own personal, political perspective. This also stands for the poet Seamus Heaney (whose poetry Bloom also includes in his 'Appendix'). Without understanding the reaction of Heaney to the political conflicts of contemporary Northern Ireland, or Orwell's reactions to the threat of a dehumanising totalitarianism, criticism of their writings becomes impoverished. Bloom's a-political literary critic is likely to conclude that *Animal Farm* is simply a fantasy in which animals revolt, and Seamus Heaney's poem *Act Of Union* is only a sexual fantasy.⁵⁰ Indeed, a strong case could be made that the very richness of writings by both Heaney and Orwell - their value - comes from both writer's uniquely personal responses to wider political issues. Bloom's arguments about the proper a-political perspective of the literary critic ignore the things which have made writings by Orwell and Heaney authoritative in our culture: the canonical processes which *The Western Canon* purports to support.

Bloom, predictably, evokes an image of the solitary critic engaging with the

greatness of canonical excellence. And according to Bloom, engaging with Shakespeare is the the pinnacle the critic's task. Typically he comments that 'Shakespeare is the canon. He sets the standards and limits of literature' ⁵¹ and that 'Shakespeare is to the world's literature what Hamlet is to the imaginary domain of literary character: a spirit that permeates everywhere, that cannot be confined'.⁵² He also claims that 'no one has matched him as psychologist, thinker or rhetorician'.⁵³ Bloom further contends 'Shakespeare's eminence is, I am certain, the rock upon which the School Of Resentment must at last flounder'.⁵⁴ With *King Lear*, he argues, the critic has reached the centre of the canon and a zone of canonical quality where 'flames of invention burn away all context and grant us the possibility of what could be called primal aesthetic value, free of history and ideology'.⁵⁵ This eulogy continues throughout *The Western Canon* and he even goes so far as to claim that the writings of Sigmund Freud are 'essentially prosified Shakespeare' and that 'Freud's vision of human psychology is derived, not altogether unconsciously, from his reading of the plays'.⁵⁶

About Bloom's preoccupation with Shakespeare, Milner, facetiously comments: 'does this mean anything more than that Bloom really, really, likes *Lear*'?'⁵⁷ I agree with Milner, but would also add that his attention to Shakespeare borders on fetishism: it is excessive, and like all fetishes, it is also irrational. Bloom sees resonances of Shakespeare everywhere and makes wild, unsupportable claims such as the implication that his plays outstrip anything yet produced by those working within the discipline of Psychology. In this instance, *The Western Canon* has something in common with some current strains of radical theory within the humanities: arrogance. Laquer, in his account of post-structuralism and post-modernism, attacks the way in which each of these theoretical movements has glibly attacked scientific, empirical and rational methods within other disciplines while electing itself as judge of important issues with complex moral, social, and political dimensions.⁵⁸ Laquer argues that this is not only arrogant but also hypocritical, because these theories have effectively turned away from rational consideration of any real social, economic, environmental, or political issues.⁵⁹

But Bloom's reverence for Shakespeare has a real, if hidden, political function in *The Western Canon*. His book begins by assuring readers that aesthetic value has an objective existence with real effects, one of which is the continuing power of Shakespeare within our culture. To legitimise such a claim, Bloom cannot, by his own logic, point to the social and institutional reasons why Shakespeare is still so influential within Anglo-American culture - he attacks any such social approach within literary criticism. Rather, Bloom calls on his charismatic authority to reinforce the aspects of the reader's social experience, and thereby cement his claims. Bloom's appeal to personal experience underlines an important reason why notions of literary value and debates about the value of the literary canon have had such a tenacious grip within literary criticism and literary studies.

Hodge comments that 'there is something very persuasive about the divisions between literary and non-literary,'⁶⁰ and this comment is illuminating when applied to *The Western Canon*, where as I have shown, Bloom seeks to establish his charismatic authority as a guarantor of this distinction. This observation also raises the question of how such distinctions are practically reinforced and established. Hodge argues, in line with his theoretical approach taken from Michel Foucault, that 'a system of genres is the product of an act of classification and classification is always a system of control,' a way, according to him, of institutional and social control. In fact *The Western Canon* does, as Hodge's model predicts, use classification to try to reinstate the authority of a literary canon.⁶¹ Bloom classifies his western canon into three ages: Aristocratic; Democratic; and Chaotic. Within his book these act as historical genres and are themselves controlled by, and revolve around, the canonical excellence of the Shakespeare. But Hodge's comments about the persuasive division between literary and non literary, being a mechanism of institutional and social control, has its drawbacks. Control is a far stronger expression than persuasion; the former implies some measure of assent and this difference is illuminating in the context of *The Western Canon*.

Bloom's book is designed, very cleverly, to get its readers to accept what is, actually, an extremely conservative case. Bloom draws on the rhetorical

force of his own personal and professional experiences to underpin his arguments. He also draws on the his readers' reservoir of 'everyday' cultural evaluation which Guillory, Connor, and Fowler identify in their discussions of cultural evaluation.⁶² Bloom aims for a particular readership to maximise the effectiveness of this strategy. He comments:

This book is not directed to academics, because only a small remnant of them still read for the love of reading. What Johnson and Woolf called the Common Reader still exists and possibly goes on welcoming suggestions of what might be read. ⁶³

The Western Canon seeks to bypass what Bloom perceives as the hopeless cause of radicalised American and British academics and address non-academic readers with literary aspirations and interests. This creates a fascinating contradiction because, where Bloom modestly describes his canon as a suggestion, he actually asserts his authority as [a senior academic working at Yale University] to underpin this suggestion. Persuasion, suggestion and authority intermingle.

For example, he argues that secular canon-formation is performed neither by critics nor academics but by readers' experience of 'strong original literary happening' which they can 'never altogether assimilate' and draw them into 'strangeness'. ⁶⁴ But he also bluffly informs his readership that:

Contemporary writers do not like to be told that they must compete with Shakespeare and Dante, and yet that struggle was Joyce's provocation to greatness, to an eminence shared only by Beckett, Proust and Kafka among modern Western authors.⁶⁵

Contemporary writers then must compete with Shakespeare and Dante. As for students of literature:

The legitimate student of the Western Canon respects the power of the negotiations inherent in cognition, enjoys the difficult pleasures of aesthetic apprehension, learns the hidden roads that erudition teaches us to walk even as we reject easier pleasures...⁶⁶

The phrase 'legitimate students' implies a negative: illegitimate students. Logically, Bloom's main thesis can be easily refuted. If, as he argues, aesthetic value objectively existed, and critics and academics really did have no role in determining the content of the canon, then his injunctions would be unnecessary. Readers would not need to be persuaded by Harold Bloom, or any other literary critic, about the brilliance of his twenty-six writers. We should simply all be overcome by the genius of these Gods of culture. The very fact that Bloom has to publish these arguments and spice them with references to 'a lifetime of teaching literature' destroys his case for the objective existence of literary value. 67

What my observation here supports is the idea that literary evaluation, as a form of cultural evaluation, can be exploited by influential individuals to further a social or political agenda. Furthermore, this connection is not always explicit and can be buried beneath or within arguments that ostensibly appear to be about such abstract concepts as 'cognitive power.' In this sense *The Western Canon* reinforces the general argument that concepts of literary value are related to the politics or social character of the group, or individual, from which they originate. Fowler argues that all literary criticism uses 'the text' for specific goals and that :

...there is in this sense no disinterested criticism. The difference is between those schools of criticism which frankly admit that they are using the work - often for political ends - and those which do not. 68

This is borne out *The Western Canon* and it also discloses an important and very worthwhile argument which is contrary to what Bloom says: literary criticism and literary critics have a responsibility to be as honest as possible about their political objectives particularly when language can come to obscure political motives and effects. Indeed, as I will show later in Chapter Three, critical reaction to novels by James Kelman and Iain Banks, displays the way in which literary evaluation can be shot through with social or political evaluation.

The Western Canon is a very political contribution to the whole debate over

value. A crucial part of Bloom's argument for the western canon is his contention that literary studies and the canon are under threat from multiculturalism and popular culture. He envisages a time where:

What are now called 'Departments of English' will be renamed 'departments of Cultural Studies' where Batman comics, Mormon theme parks, television movies, and rock will replace Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, and Wallace Stevens.⁶⁹

Bloom therefore evokes a pathos-saturated vision of 'heritage' under threat - a vision which is likely to ring conservative readers' mental alarm bells and potentially enshrine *The Western Canon* as a kind of banner for a reactionary backlash against 'progressive' views on education. Indeed, it even provides a model of how this backlash might proceed:

A culture of universal access is offered by post-Marxist idealist, as the solution to 'crisis', but how can *Paradise Lost* or *Faust, Part Two* ever lend themselves to universal access? The strongest poetry is cognitively and imaginatively too difficult to be read deeply by more than a relative few of any social class, gender, race, or ethnic origin.⁷⁰

The Western Canon ultimately argues for a return to an elitist literary education. At points it goes even further and singles out which students from which social backgrounds can be kept out after a conservative victory. Bloom argues that 'Very few working-class readers ever matter in determining the survival of texts, and left wing critics cannot do the working class's reading for it.'⁷¹ The implication of this sentence is that the working-class are not involved in literature and also that they should stay as they are. This an appalling disclosure from an individual who, on his own admission, is the son of a garment worker but who as he also points out, has been fortunate enough to find a career in American higher education.⁷² In *The Way We Live Now*, Hoggart attacks this view which he dubs the 'stay as sweet as you are' ideology and argues that it has proved to be a perfect cover for politically and culturally reactionary forces operating within contemporary British society.⁷³

The Western Canon encapsulates one possible outcome of the current debates over literary value and the canon: a return to notions of absolute value and the likelihood of a reaction against rational enquiry in literary study. *Literary Into Cultural Studies* by Anthony Easthope, in many respects, seems to be the exact opposite of Bloom's account. As its title suggest, Easthope's central thesis is that literary study should become part of cultural studies, the scenario which Bloom envisages as a disaster for literature and literary study. As I will show, *Literary Into Cultural Studies* fails to make a rational or systematic approach to the question of literary value, and consequently fails to have any theoretical coherence. Though it is politically opposite to *The Western Canon*, Easthope's book cannot fully address the totality of issues around questions about cultural evaluation. Instead, there is fragmentation and incoherence.

The Frankenstein Approach

Literary Into Cultural Studies begins by describing the forces behind the current unsettled state of literary study. Following arguments set out by Thomas S. Kuhn in *The Structure Of Scientific Revolutions*, Easthope argues that literary study is undergoing a paradigm crisis - an intense moment of doubt within the discipline in which 'a consensus about methods and ends,' is overturned by 'new evidence or contradictions.' Easthope continues:

At this point there is a crisis, a return to 'first principles' and an intense interest in theory (for which there is no need while the paradigm rides high). Thereafter, a new paradigm is established, theoretical questions are put on the shelf and things return to normal.⁷⁴

Significantly he adds 'something like this has happened in literary studies during the past two decades.'⁷⁵

This is a generalization. As Fowler, points out, British literary criticism has contained a long-standing historical tension between its descriptive and

evaluative roles.⁷⁶ That is, a tension between analysing the play, poem or novel in terms of its formal structure, and arguments about its wider 'value' as regards the national culture, humanity, western civilization, or 'the moral condition of the world'.⁷⁷ This tends to indicate that the current disordered character of literary study has a much deeper historical pedigree than one intense period of paradigm crisis. Indeed, Easthope seems to sense the vulnerability of his argument on this point. In response he cites the disaffection of American and British intellectuals after the horrors of the Second World War and Vietnam as one cause for a loss of faith in the recuperative powers of great literature and a consequent crisis of faith in literary study.⁷⁸ But he also goes on to set out a remarkably un-social and un-historical definition of 'paradigm' which he argues, 'neatly signals the dependence of understanding on discourse while involving the idea of knowledge, and so, crucially, an epistemology involving a subject/object relation.'⁷⁹

As can be seen from this example, Easthope has the unfortunate habit of introducing readers to complex theoretical terms (less kindly, jargon) without clear explanation. Nevertheless, Easthope seems to be relying upon an analysis taken from Michel Foucault. In his *The Archeology Of Knowledge* Foucault describes discourses as 'large groups of statements' which act as an inventory about particular topics or areas of social life.⁸⁰ Discourses, then, act as set of rules and conventions organising language with regard to these areas. Jeremy Hawthorn gives a clear illustration of how this might operate. 'Thus for Foucault' he argues

at a given moment in the history of say, France, there will be a particular discourse of medicine: a set of rules and CONVENTIONS and SYSTEMS of MEDIATION and transposition which govern the way illness and treatment are talked about, when, where, and by whom.⁸¹

Hawthorn goes on to point out that Foucault's views on discourse have proved to be influential as regards debates by contemporary academics about the way in which knowledge is produced and controlled by academic disciplines and institutions. A key contention within these debates is that

knowledge is not neutral, but rather is, to some extent, produced and moulded by academic institutions. According to this thesis, knowledge is never simply out there waiting to be discovered, wherever 'there' might be. Consequently, the implication is that all understanding is relative to the disciplinary paradigm, discursive terrain, or - more simply - methods used by a discipline.

As was set out in my outline to debates over valuation, this perspective has been central to arguments by post-structuralists and post-modernists and it has become extremely controversial within the American and British academic communities. Easthope subscribes to this post-structuralist analysis of the relationship between disciplines and knowledge. Indeed, it is central to his book. In *Literary Into Cultural Studies*, he contends that literary studies prior to the 'theory wars' had a set of assumptions and approaches (a paradigm) which created the 'experience of the canonical text' and that this humanist paradigm has now fallen apart. Easthope's next step is to argue that literary study, rather than cling to a fragmented and incoherent paradigm, should be accommodated within an enlarged cultural studies. Others have also offered this solution. Andrew Milner, like Easthope, strenuously makes a case for literary study as part of a 'modest' cultural studies which, in his words, 'has no desire at all to substitute movies for Milton.'⁸² Both writers underline an issue which is central to my thesis and which has two dimensions.

Firstly, there is the question of whether literary studies is capable of providing adequate methods for approaching contemporary fiction. I think not, if literary studies means textual analysis of contemporary novels over and above what it has previously describes as contexts. I argue that the contexts of publication, critical reception, and the social and political contexts of contemporary fiction, are absolutely essential - not secondary, not background. In this case they cease to be mere contexts and should be essential to approaching contemporary novels and novelists. This entails an interdisciplinary approach, something which as Milner and Easthope point out, is right at the heart of cultural studies, whether or not cultural studies is construed as a discrete discipline and graced with upper-case

letters, or seen as an area which is an alchemy of useful knowledge and better served by not being a formalized discipline.

Given this point, the second dimension to the issue is more tricky, but extremely important. It is fairly simple to reject conservative reactions to the value debate; the calls for a return to Shakespeare, the authority of the western canon, or the 'quasi-religious worship' of literary texts, particularly when they are mouthed by politicians or academics who espouse elitist visions of literary study. But, after rejecting a return to absolutism, the difficulty comes in producing a methodologically and theoretically coherent approach to evaluating literary texts. The danger here resides in what I shall call fragmentation: an intellectually incoherent and irrational reaction to the value debate. *Literary Into Cultural Studies* is a good example of this tendency.

In Chapter Three of his book, Easthope deals explicitly with what he dubs 'The Question Of Literary Value.'⁸³ He comments that theories of literary value 'fall into three categories: mimetic, expressive and formalist.'⁸⁴ And secondly, that 'At present the prevailing notion of literary value is inextricably bound up with the conventional account of literary study.'⁸⁵ This second comment is fundamentally inaccurate and its inaccuracy is due to central deficiencies in *Literary Into Cultural Studies*. Literary evaluation is connected to much wider and more fundamental processes of cultural valuation - it did not simply appear with F. R. Leavis - and it manages to appear in the most unlikely moments and contexts. I give one brief example.

On the 27th of March 1994, Pete Townshend, a founder member of *The Who*, one of the most influential British Rock Bands of the 1960s, was faced in a television interview by a fan who was a student at Rotherham College of Higher Education.⁸⁶ The student had chosen the 'rock opera' *Tommy*, as the subject of his degree dissertation. Townshend looked dismayed and slightly uncomfortable. Andrew Neil, Editor of *The Daily Express*, who was hosting the discussion, suddenly declared that he had been to university and commented: 'when I was there we did Shakespeare not *Tommy*.' The

grinning student informed Neil that his research into the rock opera was part of a cultural studies module. Townshend disparagingly commented 'Didn't that sort of thing start in America...'⁸⁶ Cultural restorationists such as Roger Scruton support a return to cultural absolutism not because it will help literary study but because it will help the state combat 'the perceived moral permissiveness and the decline in standards of social, economic, ethical and religious behaviour'.⁸⁷ The only connections between the comments of an ageing rock star, and a right-wing academic, is their belief in what might be described as a 'common sense' set of belief systems about literature, particularly a conviction that it has its cultural authority and dignity.

Nor are ethical concerns about the state of cultural valuation confined to the political Right in Britain. In 1991 on BBC 2's 'highbrow' arts programme *The Late Show*, the playwright David Hare called for 'a more demanding idea of cultural value' among the British Left.⁸⁸ His argument was that by abandoning questions of cultural value and embracing an 'anything goes' approach, the Left was also disengaging itself from debates about moral and social value. Hare implied that this was an act of political self-castration which suited the current needs of capitalism because it reinforced commercial advertising and marketing as they promoted 'pick and mix' populism in their efforts to maximise profits.

Unfortunately, Hare's attempt to raise this important issue was obscured by the by-now infamous 'soundbite' in which he argued that Keats was 'finally' a better poet than Bob Dylan. As McGuigan points out the playwright's public blunder meant that he appeared to support a return to absolutist cultural evaluation whereas he was trying to open up a serious debate about cultural evaluation. By comparing two canonized poets and the over-simplified, epigramic phrasing of his soundbite, Hare's contribution helped to trivialise the debate about cultural value in subsequent *Late Show* programmes. Rather than a serious examination of how advertising and marketing were manipulating cultural valuation, or how the British Left might develop more durable protocols for evaluation, the debate focused on his uncompromising statement and developed into a row over Hare's

political leanings.

In his intelligent overview of debates about cultural value, McGuigan points out 'how ethical questions, which are also political questions, are integrally related to cultural value.'⁸⁹ Arguments over literary evaluation are rooted in these wider issues and contrary to Easthope's contention, concepts of literary value are not simply bound up with the study of literary texts, but with a whole set of engrained notions about cultural value and authority. Easthope's comment, 'I want to redefine and reinstate literary value in a way which cleanses it of the hegemonic force it acquires in the paradigm of literary study'⁹⁰ is a fantasy which relies on the mistaken understanding that literary intellectuals can withdraw themselves from the influences of the society which they inhabit and only need to take account of developments within their field of academe.

Eagleton, Hoggart, and Laquer, all argue that one defining mark of post-modernist and post-structuralist thinking during the 1980s was the extent to which it has acted as a euphemism for social and political disengagement by intellectuals, a turning away from social concepts such as ideology and class. Easthope's argument that the 'hegemonic force' of literary value solely derives from its place within literary study, and that he can therefore destroy this hegemonic force by recourse to literary theory, is a symptom of this wider intellectual fantasy. The reason for such misconceptions can be linked to Easthope's intellectual commitment to post-structuralist thought. *Literary Into Cultural Studies* is dogged by the inherent incompatibility of post-structuralist thinking and systematic analysis. This creates disabling contradictions, which are especially notable in his account of Marxist theory.

Literary Into Cultural Studies argues that Marx's analysis of Greek Art discloses the idea that texts are 'reproduced transhistorically' and that 'they take on meaning in relation to the very different ideological conditions of contemporary life.'⁹¹ Easthope continues this line of reasoning and argues that 'the operation of language' ensures 'continuing reproduction and reiteration' whereby literary texts are lifted out of their original context of

production. He concludes:

Literary value is a function of the reader/text relation, and cannot be defined outside the history in which texts - some more than others - demonstrably have functioned intertextually to give a plurality of different readings transhistorically: the greater the text the more we are compelled to read it through a palimpsest of other interpretations. Not much more can be said about literature unless it is assumed to be an essence. 92

Marx's analysis of Greek art is in the introduction to his unfinished *Grundrisse*. In his introduction to the 1970 edition of *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Dobb notes that the *Grundrisse* was regarded as a "fragmentary sketch" by Marx, and as a testing-out of ideas.⁹³ In relation to Marx's discussion of Greek Art, Bottomore argues that his analysis needs to be seen in the light of more general qualifications by Marx and Engels about the relationship between base and superstructure, and as evidence that neither writer perceived this relationship as mechanistic.⁹⁴

The passages to which Easthope refers are in Section Four of the *Grundrisse* and under the title 'Production.' Marx prefaces the discussion, 'Notes regarding points which have to be mentioned in this context.'⁹⁵ This signals that he regarded the *Grundrisse*, specifically its comments about art, as notes for his own use and as a kind of mental exploration of problems or advantages for the approach outlined in *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. Indeed, parts of the *Grundrisse* were re-written and integrated in the *Critique*'.⁹⁶ Note 6 in the sub-section of the *Grundrisse* concerned with Production, carries the heading: 'The unequal development of material production and, e.g., that of art.' He comments:

The concept of progress is on the whole, not to be understood in the usual abstract form. Modern art etc. This disproportion is not as important and difficult to grasp as within concrete social relations, e.g., in education. Relations of the United States to Europe. 97

At the end of the list Marx expands this section on art and the reader can sense how he is intrigued by the relationship of art to his wider theories about the historical development of capitalist production. He begins:

As regards art, it is well known that some of its peaks by no means correspond the general development of society; nor do they therefore to the material superstructure, the skeleton as it were of its organisation. 98

Marx's subsequent discussion of Greek art and art in general, needs to be seen in relation to this question and of the way in which artistic production can be out-of-time with given socio-economic relations of production. Marx has set a test for his theories about historical materialism. He continues by pointing out that:

The difficulty we are confronted with is not, however, that of understanding how Greek art and epic poetry are associated with certain forms of social development. The difficulty is that they still give us aesthetic pleasure and are in some respects regarded as a standard and unattainable ideal. 99

Marx proposes an elegant solution to this potential problem for his theory of historical materialism. He argues that the immature social development which saturates Greek art and epic poetry is the root cause of their appeal to far more technologically and socially sophisticated societies:

The charm their art has for us does not conflict with the immature stage of the society in which it originated. On the contrary its charm is a consequence of this and is inseparably linked with the fact that the immature social conditions which gave rise, and which alone could give rise, to this art cannot recur. 100

This is contrary to Easthope, because Marx argues that Greek art becomes attractive in the context of our (for Marx, nineteenth-century) society with its complex relations of production and advanced technological forces. It is not

just language or 'signifying practices' which creates this pleasurable contrast, but the economic and social dynamism of industrial society, a society about which Marx was an early, and percipient writer. Ephemeral 'reader text relations' do not govern the physical reproduction of old art and literature, nor produce its value in Marx's account.

The apparent contradiction of the *Iliad* in a capitalist society with the ability to mass-produce texts, is not, Marx argues, a real contradiction, but rather comes out of the advanced social and technological forces which suffuse this society and differentiate it from earlier more technologically and socially primitive ones, thereby creating the *Iliad's* value for nineteenth-century readers. Value is not produced transhistorically as Easthope would have it, but in a very real sense comes out of the structure of the society which beholds Greek art or epic poetry. Marx's theory of historical materialism and his arguments over cultural valuation buttress each other in the *Grundrisse's* account of art. Furthermore, in note six, Marx is insistent that the unequal development of productive forces, including the development of art, cannot be divorced from an analysis of the relations of production in any period. Analysing art, literature and implicitly ideas of cultural value, according to Marx, should therefore take place within an analysis of these 'concrete social relations'.¹⁰¹

Easthope's interpretation of this section of the *Grundrisse* is significantly flawed because he fails to connect Marx's discussion of art and literature, with their function as a support to his wider analysis of technological-social development. This occurs because Easthope cherry picks Marx's emphasis on the reproduction of valuation, but incoherently avoids the systematic analysis out of which this perspective arises. Such magpie tendencies destroy the original coherency of Marx's argument and they are also seriously reductive because literary value is not reproduced via the whole ensemble of technological and socio-economic forces within capitalism as Marx argues, but rather, so Easthope would have us believe, by language alone.

Ironically, this is far more reductive and one-dimensional than the versions

of 'expressive totality', which Easthope criticises. To say that cultural valuation relies upon language alone, is as bad as the crudest form of economic determinism and the argument, for example, that literary value is solely produced by capitalist literary production for the purpose of maximising profits. Yet, as Laquer, Norris, and Jackson, all point out such arguments are seriously put forward by post-structuralists who are insistent that meaning is produced by 'signifying practices'.¹⁰²

Easthope's distinction, is the extent to which a post-structuralist premise is followed by a peculiarly hybrid menu, taking elements from the writings of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Marx, Jacques Lacan, and Edward Said. Taking the metaphor from Milner,¹⁰³ *Literary Into Cultural Studies*, epitomises what might be called the 'Frankenstein' tendencies within some quarters over debates about literary value. Easthope's approach certainly has the theoretical vigour absent in *The Western Canon*, but its eclecticism and the way in which Easthope stitches bits of theory together creates some ugly inconsistencies and contradictions. These destroy the intellectual coherence necessary for sustained enquiry into the social and economic dimensions of contemporary British novels. Ultimately they deter a rational, systematic approach to the value debate and by doing so play into the hands of conservatives and their agenda for literary study, which would be a real horror story.

The Way We Live Now and A Way Forward

Like Easthope, Hoggart is keen to emphasise that cultural studies can offer literary study some important insights. Here, however any comparison ends and the reason why it ends is absolutely essential to understanding Hoggart's position on cultural evaluation which lies at the centre of *The Way We Live Now*. Hoggart's book begins with the assertion that the political character of Britain since 1979 is closely related to a circumvention of valuation and the power of relativism. He comments

This is a surf - riding phase in British life. The wave of relativism - the obsessive avoidance of judgments of quality, or moral judgment - has risen higher than ever before (as in all

prosperous societies). Here, since 1979, one political party has
with much success ridden that wave. 104

Hoggart then, connects the electoral success of the Tory party in Britain (up until 1997 that is) with its ability to 'combine the exploitation of relativism with new forms of authoritarianism, of populism with privilege.'¹⁰⁵

The Way We Live Now is complex and extremely wide-ranging. Readers are taken through subjects as diverse as recent education policy; misuses of language; the role and methods of cultural studies; the relationship between mass and popular culture; arts policy; and English attitudes to the intellectual. But his approach to all these subjects is informed by a defence of valuation, most particularly literary valuation, and an attack on all forms of relativism.

Throughout Hoggart consistently attacks what he describes as the ideology of relativism and he perceives malign manifestations of this relativist ideology in all the subjects which I have just listed. Education policy is distorted by 'vocationalism' described as 'one way of avoiding difficult choices of value, of looking seriously at the injustice which runs through the education system'.¹⁰⁶ Language is corrupted by the relativist rot to the extent in which it increasingly dodges reality and judgment.¹⁰⁷ Mass culture 'processes experience so that customers don't catch troublesome fish-bones in their mental throats,' and it exploits and cheapens potentially progressive elements within popular culture.¹⁰⁸ Relativist tendencies within cultural studies are also attacked. Hoggart comments that because 'it concerns itself with the phenomena of modern life at all levels' cultural studies 'is in the thick of the relativist society and is itself affected by that relativism, sometimes disablingly.'¹⁰⁹ In a chapter of his book entitled 'The Arts: Intellectual, Artistic and Academic Relativism', he explicitly tackles artistic and intellectual forms of relativist doctrine. 'The suggestion' he comments:

that there is a difference of quality between *North and South*
and *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist* or *Brother to the Ox*,
valuable though Tressell's and Kitchen's books are, will produce

letters accusing you of a narrow, highbrow vision, socially motivated snobbishness and an out-of-date clinging to a received order you do not have the guts to question. 110

He also attacks what he calls 'the good of its kind' argument:

It might just be admitted by some people that there are differences in complexity and range (anything to avoid 'value') between *Paradise Lost* and a Bob Dylan lyric; but each is 'good of its kind' and so they should not be set against each other. 111

The Way We Live Now is a political and polemical contribution to debates about cultural valuation and it has important links with the most recent phase of these debates. In his book about the concept of Ideology, Eagleton connects claims by post-modernist, post-structuralist and other relativist doctrines about the obsolescence of ideology with a 'steady shamefaced' retreat by sections of the political Left in the face of a dynamic and offensive period in capitalism.¹¹² This is very close to Hoggart's emphasis on the dynamism of contemporary British society as a primal cause for the triumph of relativism. Furthermore, Eagleton like Hoggart, attacks the ethical and political results of this relativist wave. Eagleton sarcastically comments that without the concept of ideology: 'We cannot brand Pol Pot a Stalinist bigot since this would imply some metaphysical certitude about what not being a Stalinist bigot would involve.'¹¹³

The most powerful argument by Hoggart, in what is a passionate and persuasive book, concerns this same abandonment of ethical and moral values alongside other forms of discrimination. He describes it as the 'stay as sweet as you are' rationale and argues that it is patronising as well as a dereliction of duty for intellectuals on the left to subject 'anyone from a bookless home' to a 'prior social filtering of literature rather than a judgment of differing qualities'.¹¹⁴ He also criticises the way in which the Left has wasted its energy on debates over valuation and comments, that the Right 'don't mind' such debates because 'they know what the arts are and who they are for.'¹¹⁵

The Way We Live Now seeks to reclaim some viable sense of cultural valuation for the British Left and manifestations of this broad strategy can be clearly seen in the kind of literary criticism which Hoggart advocates. The implication throughout his account is that the proper business of the left-wing critic is to encourage more rather than less valuation and evaluation and in a very revealing section of his book he discloses why:

This is, again, a largely sub-literate society, if literacy means more than the ability simply to read and write, not to assess. Democracy is always more an intention than an achievement. A semi-literate society suits well some of the forces now at work.¹¹⁶

Very significantly, Hoggart adds: 'An achieved democracy must work for critical literacy.'¹¹⁷ All three sentences are very important for three reasons. Firstly, by arguing for more rather than less evaluation they overturn the substance, as well as tone, of recent arguments by radical or left-wing literary critics. Hoggart confidently argues that valuation is an asset rather than a problem. Secondly, Hoggart sets out a new role for the radical or socialist cultural intellectual. Their, primary task his argument implies, is to encourage a sharp 'critical literacy' among students and the general population because this will allow the currently semi-literate to see through the patronising superficiality of mass-marketing and the inauthentic platitudes of politicians. Thirdly, Hoggart envisages literary study as an area which can help bring about a more effective democracy and he envisages 'critical literacy' as an effective tool in pursuit of this goal.

Hoggart's agenda for literary study in the future has some interesting resonances with Bloom. In one sense both writers adhere to the same hypothesis: that in technologically - and commercially-driven western nations, contemporary culture gravitates towards its lowest common denominator. Furthermore, both writers connect ongoing attacks upon literary evaluation as indicative of an unholy alliance between careerist academics and the crass commercial exploitation of culture.

But in other key ways *The Way We Live Now* and *The Western Canon*

radically differ. Hoggart, for example, sees a vital connection between literary study and cultural studies.¹¹⁸ Nor is he intrinsically opposed to the use of theory in analysing literary, or any other kind of texts, as is Bloom. But this argument rests on claims that one of the distinctive problems with contemporary cultural studies is the extent to which it has become theoretically incoherent because cultural studies, like everything else according to Hoggart, is becoming increasingly tainted by relativism. It is here that he singles out Easthope's *Literary Into Cultural Studies* as typical of this damaging collapse in valuation, and I completely agree. In explicit reference to Chapter five, Part Two of Easthope's book Hoggart comments that: 'To devote an essay to a comparison between Conrad's *Heart Of Darkness* and Burroughs's *Tarzan Of The Apes* without raising the question of level is largely futile, playing around in the shallows.'¹¹⁹ Theory then, according to him, must be partly judged by how successfully it handles questions of level and by how powerful it is in evaluating what texts are of lasting importance and what are mere ephemera.

Another key difference between Bloom and Hoggart, is the extent to which the former is open about the political drive behind his arguments for more evaluation and discrimination. Fowler, has made the important point that valuation by literary or cultural critics is inescapably linked to their political perspective - political in its broadest sense. What distinguished Bloom's account, as I showed earlier in this chapter, was his insistence that literary study was not a place for explicit political crusades, while hypocritically going on to mark out an elitist future for literary study in which an established elite transmit the very best literary values to a trainee literary elite; those students and teachers who do not match up are left in some inferior realm. At best this constitutes a form of intellectual doublethink, at worst it could be construed as intellectual dishonesty. What is most striking about Bloom's account is the way in which politics is first refused, and then smuggled back in. This suggests that the political dimensions of debates over evaluation are inescapable, and further, that they are best confronted openly as Fowler, argues.¹²⁰

In contrast with Bloom, Hoggart is refreshingly candid about the political

criteria behind his approach to evaluation. *The Way We Live Now* is wholly opposed to the divisive split which Bloom recommends. Indeed, his argument is that by insisting that 'there is no great art' the British Left recommends a phony misplaced egalitarianism which reinforces the patronising perception that ordinary or working-class people cannot appreciate art without moral guidance from intellectuals.

It would be easy to criticise Hoggart's book on account of its conservatism, as he himself senses,¹²¹ but I think this would be a mistake because despite several problems with his account of how literary evaluation should proceed, Hoggart's book is a perceptive examination of the wider forces underlying current debates over valuation. It is also a timely and very important argument about the ethically and morally crippling consequences which arise when cultural evaluation is either dismissed or abandoned. As I set out earlier in my examination of Easthope, and also in my general outline of debates over evaluation, relativist doctrine is in some ways even less appealing than any return to absolutism.

The Way We Live Now has some old-fashioned aspects and this creates problems, particularly with respect to the way in which Hoggart represents mass culture. For example, he points to the phenomena of McGill's postcards and comments:

those saucy comic post cards used to appear on the rack outside newsagents shops, especially at the seaside. They still do in some places, though now rather self-consciously and as reprints. ¹²²

He goes on to propose a complementary study in contemporary mass art: 'we could do an essay today on the main types of cards sent home from the Costa Brava and Majorca' and argues that this would require a 'sympathetic and controlled distance' rather than 'jumping into the pool of mass culture with a glad cry.' But this underlines the problem of how to conduct such a study without recourse to arbitrary and purely subjective responses to mass-culture. Rosen observes that one of the less savoury characteristics of such approaches is the way in which they are sometimes

premised by an implicit understanding that the intellectual or teacher is outside the relativist society which Hoggart condemns and can therefore easily achieve the controlled distance which he values. Rosen severely criticises this assumption:

One old new way is for the teacher to open the eyes of his gullible pupils to the seductions of mass-media and advertising. Himself immune (by what process of inoculation?) he will give immunity to others. 123

The Way We Live Now carries traces of this assumption, and no framework is provided as to how literary study can proceed without recourse to very subjective and probably totally arbitrary ideas about valuation. Probably the argument that most mass culture is dross except that which the critic decides, for whatever reason, has some merit, an approach which Hoggart himself adopted in his book *The Uses Of Literacy*.¹²⁴ Furthermore, this is hardly a reasoned or coherent 'method' for literary study.

A further objection to Hoggart's concept of 'controlled distance' is uncovered here. If literary study is solely premised upon the personal predilections of the researcher, critic or teacher then the way is open for distortion of the processes of selection and discrimination. Which contemporary novels, plays or poems come to be seen as outstanding, important or even literary in the future is unlikely to be decided on any coherent criteria but decided, instead, by the power and influence of the institution or individuals which promote them. Indeed, selection might not wholly involve academic institutions because in the commercially-driven environment which Hoggart describes, valuation itself has, according to his account, been complicit with commercial objectives. In this case it is not too fantastic to imagine how a contemporary novelist might achieve a place on an academic syllabus and garner critical praise partly on the basis of how effectively their novel, play or poem was marketed and promoted by their publisher. Of course, this would be cynically 'targeted' at academics and the academic market, and it would be aimed at producing the necessary market image for the relevant publishing house.

For studies of contemporary novels the processes of evaluation, selection and discrimination are crucial because they are at their most vulnerable when novels and novelists have not yet fully acquired their reputation (whether critical or popular) nor yet been consigned to publishers' backlists and obscurity.¹²⁵

In light of Chapter Three, and which examines the critical reception given to novels by Banks and Kelman, it is clear that academic as well as commercial critics have not been distanced or controlled in their interpretations, but have rather displayed elitism, outright prejudice, arbitrariness, inaccuracy or a predictable conservatism. This does not suggest that what comes to be regarded as novels with 'literary merit' do so by objective 'controlled' criteria. Furthermore, in Chapter Four, I show that publishers and booksellers are also involved in organising hierarchies of literary value; particularly with regard to divisions between mass market fiction and literary fiction. Commercial imperatives are also involved within what comes to be promoted and probably seen as valuable fiction. More fundamentally, Raymond Williams and others have drawn attention to the way in which what comes to be promoted by the literary-cultural establishment has the effect of marginalising writings from working-class or other 'devalued' cultures.¹²⁶ For these reasons radical reactions against the canon and current modes of literary selection, have some justification for their disaffection.

Despite my reservations over Hoggart's recommendations for literary evaluation, his book has some unique qualities. *The Way We Live Now* conveys the wider interplay of commerce, politics, culture and ideology which sets a backdrop for the current academic debates over cultural and literary evaluation. It also points to the erosion of social and cultural authority which Hobsbawm, and others, perceive at the root of contemporary British society. Hoggart comments, 'For more than a century, and most rapidly in the last half-century the powers of Authority, whether lay or religious, have been eroded,' and he continues:

It can now with hindsight be seen that forms of relativism would take their place; and that that transformation would be vastly

accelerated, in commercial democracies, by greater and more widespread prosperity, the urge to sell everything from clothes to notions, and so the need to persuade; which is the other main technical force, the technologies of mass communication comes to the front. 127

It is precisely because literature is regarded as a key medium of cultural continuity and authority that literary study and literary criticism have suffered most from this acceleration in the forces of fragmentation and relativism. The cultural authority which is essential to the very concept of literature and instituted literary study,¹²⁸ is most affected by a period in which cultural stability has collapsed into a 'diasporic plurality of sub-cultures'¹²⁹ and in which the 'dominant emotion was that of living in a 'permanent present.'¹³⁰ There are also other more immediate causes in Britain for the re-emergence of debates over evaluation in the late 1980s to mid 1990s.

The crisis in authority which Hoggart describes deepened in Britain during the early 1990s. There was a widespread sense that British political and cultural institutions were in crisis and that their authority was tarnished. A deep recession hit 'managerial, professional, home-owning thoroughly middle-class' groups which had rarely experienced unemployment before.¹³¹ The nation was presided over by a government which was involved in internecine struggles, and which lacked direction as well as authority. Allegations of corruption tainted British political culture. There was a perceived 'crisis in education'. Notions of national identity also seemed to be in turmoil, resulting in some unpleasant xenophobia.¹³² *Complicity* captures this widespread mood of disaffection, cynicism and skepticism.

One of the most important stylistic dimensions of the novel is the way in which representations of factual events chime with the emotional or mental states of the its characters. Colley is the politicised and cynical central character of *Complicity*, and his characterisation is used by Banks to symbolise a wider mood of disaffection, cynicism and protest. Colley describes how he 'watched the television pictures of the drenched crowds as they wound through the London streets protesting against the Mine

Closures' (p. 12).

These protests occurred in 1992 and, as Banks indicates, the miners cause attracted massive public support. *Complicity* suggests that the mine closures of the early 1990s had become a unifying symbol for a much deeper protest against market forces and a dominant laissez-faire ideology. In *Complicity*, this argument is thematized through Andy, a central character who chooses terrorism as his expression of frustration at the direction and structure of contemporary British society. Andy's actions and his motives are used by Banks to show readers how a general disaffection and cynicism might, if not healed, channel itself into violence, an understandable but nevertheless destructive and irrational protest. Andy is this general dissent personified, and in this sense *Complicity* could be said to capture the danger proposed by current debates over evaluation, nihilism, irrationalism, and the abandonment of judgment.

This also discloses that a rational, systematic, and explanatory approach to literary study is also going to be an ethically and politically informed approach. Nor, as Bloom would have us believe, does this disallow a sensitive, appreciative attitude to the value of contemporary literature or any other kind of artform. As Milner points out, intellectual realisation that value is produced by the 'valuing community' or society, does not detract from recognition of the emotional, or political value of literature. Indeed, recognising the emotional, symbolic appeal of literature is essential for any literary study which claims to be comprehensive.¹³³

In what follows I adhere to these fundamental guidelines, and they can be seen to inform my primary concerns, as when I examine how novels by Banks and Kelman have been evaluated by literary critics; provide an interpretation of their novels and compare this with the critical reception given to novels by Kelman and Banks; look at how publishers and bookshops have promoted and valued their novels for potential readers and examine how notions of cultural status such as 'the literary' might collude with forms of social status like class.

Endnotes

- 1 Mulhern, 'Culture', p. 87.
- 2 Widdowson, p. 1222.
- 3 Widdowson, p. 1222.
- 4 Widdowson, p. 1233.
- 5 Bloom, p. 10.
- 6 Milner, p. 8.
- 7 Rick Rylance, ed. *Debating Texts: A Reader In Twentieth-Century Literary Theory and Method* (Milton Keynes: O. U. P. Press, 1987), p. 2.
- 8 Widdowson, p. 1222.
- 9 Fowler, 'Literature', p. 43.
- 10 Connor, p. 33.
- 11 Fowler, 'Literature', p. 3.
- 12 Connor, p. 32.
- 13 Eagleton, *Literary*, p. 199.
- 14 Bill Ashcroft et al., *The Empire Writes Back: Theory And Practice In Post-Colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 7.
- 15 Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (Garden City N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970), p. 25.
- 16 Milner, p. 25; Widdowson, p. 1233; Hoggart, p. 84.
- 17 Connor, p. 33.
- 18 Milner, p. 46. Milner refers to Terry Eagleton's *Criticism and Ideology* (London: New Left Books, 1976), p. 185.
- 19 Janice Radway, 'Mail-Order Culture and Its Critics: The Book Of The Month Club, Commodification and Consumption, and the Problem of Cultural Authority', in Grossberg, pp. 512-527.
- 20 Ibid., p. 525.
- 21 Willison, p. 104.
- 22 Bourdieu, p. 10.
- 23 Harold Fromm, *Academic Capitalism and Literary Value* (Athens and London: Univ. Of Georgia Press, 1991), p. ix.
- 24 Harriet Hawkins, *Classics and Trash: Tradition and Taboos In High Literature and Popular Modern Genres* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), p. 106.
- 25 Peter U. Hohendahl, *The Institution Of Criticism* (London: Cornell Univ. Press, 1982) p. 45.
- 26 Jacques Derrida, *Disseminations*, trans. Barbara Johnson (London: Athlone Press, 1981), p. 49.
- 27 Norris, p. 110.
- 28 Bennett, p. 276.
- 29 Bennett, p. 277
- 30 Bennett, p. 19.
- 31 Norris, p. 122.
- 32 Norris, p. 122.
- 33 Bennett, p. 54.

- 34 Connor, p. 33.
- 35 Norris, p. 118.
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Chapter 2

Evaluating Contemporary Novels: Iain Banks and James Kelman

Introduction

Kelman's novels have been the subject of a confused and hurried scramble by critics eager to install them in a variety of literary traditions. This has frequently marginalised their essential political objective which is to speak for and about what Kelman describes as 'ordinary men and women'. Recognising Kelman's political aim is essential in order properly to understand their use of voice, language, relationship to other working-class novels, representation of class and social structure. To substantiate my interpretation I refer to *A Busconductor Hines*, *A Chancer*, *A Disaffection*, and *How Late It Was, How Late*. Kelman has also had a significant career as a short story author, and short story collections such as *The Burn* and *Not Not While The Giro*, contain some of his best work. In my examination of Kelman's novels I therefore make reference to both of these collections, showing how they shed light on motifs within the author's novels.

One of the defining characteristics of Banks's novels is the extent to which they draw upon a wide range of literary styles and genres. In the following I argue that this eclecticism is evidence of the way in which the author's novels span the divisions between popular and literary fiction. I argue that this is deliberate and aimed at disrupting the divisions which are commonly erected between popular and literary fiction. In *Walking On Glass*, *The Bridge*, *The Crow Road*, *Complicity*, and *Espedair Street* this political-literary aim is structurally and stylistically expressed through a deliberate blurring of literary and popular genres, subversive humour, and critical comments about perceptions of literary value. In a chronological examination of Banks's novels, I identify a vein of serious criticism about the values, priorities, and direction of contemporary British society.

Breaking The Silence: James Kelman and the Contemporary British Novel

Literary controversies can sometimes appear to have a hollow ring. Introducing offensive language or representations seems to be a certain way to ensure maximum public attention for a first novel. Seen from this perspective, the term controversy can seem a euphemism, little more than a convenient and calculated way for a novelist to begin a literary career by provoking the shrill cries of conservative critics and reviewers. This was not a deliberate tactic by James Kelman. In Britain at least, the author and his novels have been dogged by public controversy and critical disagreement. Kelman himself has registered surprise at the extent of largely unprovoked and frequently vehement attacks on his novels. When I asked him about these attacks he commented: 'The Booker stuff in years 89 and 94 was quite startling, the prejudice from Paulin, Greer, Mars-Jones, etc. followed by the national media furore.'¹

Critics have also pursued personal attacks on the author. An anonymous critic in *The Observer*, described Kelman as a 'hard-nosed, curmudgeonly, committed extremist'.² Andrew O'Hagan writing for *The Guardian* censured Kelman for hypocrisy and satirised his representation of the 'one Great Anglo-American Conglomerate of Establishment-and-Institutionally-Vested-Interests on Behalf of Imperialism Racism and Associated Bad Eggery'.³ After being awarded the Booker Prize in 1994 the author and his novels were the targets of an extended satirical campaign by several national newspapers. Kelman was called 'an illiterate savage' and his books were likened to 'the obscene ramblings of a Glaswegian drunk'.⁴

Such venom has been accompanied by the unholy scramble of other critics and reviewers seeking to wheel in a bewildering array of literary precedents for Kelman's novels and short stories. [G] Kirby Martin reviewing *A Disaffection* argued that the novel had 'literary precedents going back at least to Benjamin's Constant's *Adolphe* and ranging through Dostoyevsky's *Notes From The Underground* to the works of Kafka, Sartre and Camus.'⁵ Karl Miller likened the same protagonist to 'a Glaswegian Hamlet'.⁶

Alongside Shakespeare, comparisons have been made with Beckett, Chekhov, Zola, Lewis Grassie Gibbon, David Storey, Alan Sillitoe and even Milton.

In short, critics seem uncertain as to the precise literary tradition which Kelman is working within. On the one hand, a continental canon of realist or existential writers and dramatists is erected. On the other, critics locate Kelman within a working-class canon of regional or specifically Scottish writers. To confuse matters still further, several critical accounts have argued that novels by the author draw upon several different literary traditions at the same time. [G] For example, Stevenson argues that Kelman profits from what he calls a 'double allegiance' to both a Scottish tradition of 'hard worded realism' while also belonging to an emerging tradition of Scottish postmodernist writers.⁷

It is possible to locate novels by James Kelman within any of these categories, although some are less feasible than others. My argument is that such categorising procedures are unhelpful when considering novels by Kelman because they are likely to draw attention away from their essential connection with a far more pertinent issue: the relationship of the contemporary British novel to social, political and cultural life. Antonio Gramsci, writing in the 1920s, noted and analysed a fundamental problem affecting cultural life in Italy. He ironically commented:

It is strange that rationalism is acclaimed and justified in Architecture and not in the other arts. Is it perhaps that architecture alone has practical aims? This certainly looks like the case because architecture is used to build houses...One might say that houses are more necessary than the products of other arts meaning by this that everybody needs a house, while the products of the arts are necessary only for the intellectuals, for the cultured. ⁸

Novels by James Kelman seek to address this literary, and broader, cultural problem. They aim towards a contemporary novel which speaks for and about ordinary men and women. This is at their core, and is central to understanding and explaining some prominent fictional devices and styles

within them. Kelman himself has taken every opportunity to stress this political-literary project lying behind his novels. In his non-fictional *Essays Cultural and Political: Some Recent Attacks* he impugns the 'society that is English Literature [where] some eighty to eighty-five per cent of the population simply did not exist as human beings'.⁹ *Essays Cultural and Political* contains some caustic attacks on what Kelman derides as the regional, class, sexual or racial stereotypes which he argues 'English Literature' upholds.

A distinctive characteristic of novels by Kelman is their refusal to bring the reader face to face with what Doyle, the central character of *A Disaffection* sarcastically calls 'the Greatbritish Ruling Class'. *A Disaffection* comes closest to examining the psychology of the dominant class, because the novel examines the issue of class ascension. Doyle is the focus for this examination and it is made very clear to the reader that his occupation as a teacher is at the root of his personal disaffection. In a tense scene where he visits his unemployed brother he encounters smouldering resentment and accusations that he has become 'a middle class wanker' (p.281). In Doyle, Kelman highlights the divisive nature of the British class system. Doyle is caught between two cultures, his native working class and the middle class dominant culture which his University education and profession expect him to uphold. This conflict is central to *A Disaffection*, and is clearly and causally linked to his embittered position, why he is constantly being on the point of just 'fucking chucking it', why he constantly vacillates between his love of teaching and his contempt for the institutional pedagogic power that the school represents. Old Milne, the headmaster, represents this institutional authority. Milne is symbolic because relations between Milne and Doyle are used by Kelman to stand for the state of relations between authority and its subjects, between rulers and ruled. Such an unequal relationship is exemplified by an exchange between Doyle and Old Milne:

I was wanting to have a word with you Mr Doyle.

Well I was actually in a hurry the now.

Old Milne's baffled look!!! That somebody could be in a hurry when he was wanting to have a talk..

Mmm...old Milne relaxed, the roles were being redefined and the two continued to stand there. It was a crucial factor about the

headmaster, this failure he had of clinching matters, these conversations, pauses he seemed to introduce so that the other person became duty bound to say something. (p. 29)

Silences, suspicions and miscomprehension characterise this exchange. Milne begins by signalling his institutional formal role with the commanding interrogative 'I was wanting to have a word with you.' This has parallels with the kind of scolding that Milne might inflict on an errant pupil, and Kelman is adept at describing subtle connections between language-use and power. Milne, for example, uses silence: 'pauses he seemed to introduce' as a weapon, as an instrument of power. This is a strategy which Doyle recognises and like all the central characters of novels by Kelman, he resists. *A Disaffection*, in common with other novels by its author, adopts the perspective of those who have power exercised upon them. Readers are not given access to the mental states, emotions or perspectives of figures of authority. They are deliberately excluded from the narrative and remain unknowable. Privileging the victims of their power, therefore is a political strategy. Kelman has commented:

In our society we aren't used to thinking about literature as something that might concern the day-to-day existence of ordinary men and women, whether these ordinary women and men are the subjects of the poetry and stories, or the actual writers themselves.¹⁰

Representing ordinary everyday existence requires a definition by the writer of what constitutes such an existence. Kelman defines this reality as the repression of ordinary men and women in contemporary British society and his fiction envisages giving a voice to the silenced and marginalised. As the non-dialogue between Milne and Doyle demonstrates, a very general political aim is represented through specific, painstakingly rendered scenes. In *The Busconductor Hines* the context is an industrial dispute which Hines becomes involved with. The reader is taken through a complex demonstration of workplace hierarchy at the bus depot where Hines works. Kelman describes such complex nuances of status, for example, through a very detailed description of the Office of the Superintendent whom Hines visits:

The superintendent was writing into a folder. He was sitting at his folder, writing away. This is what he does. Meanwhile, Sammy and Fairlie were standing a yard apart, to the left side of where Hines stood facing the desk. (p. 208)

The Superintendent is defined by his use of mental rather than physical labour: he writes in his folder; 'this is what he does', while the representatives of the working-classes stand to attention before his desk-bound authority. Such descriptions are richly metaphorical in their minute description of social structure and status, exactly the opposite of the accusation by the critic Adam Mars-Jones that Kelman's brand of what he calls minimalism comes perilously close to a narratological poverty.¹¹ In *The Busconductor Hines*, language, once again, is used to betray the power relationships which oppress the central protagonists of Kelman's novels.

Hines delegates his case to the authority of the trade union representatives Sammy and Fairlie, a move which angers the Superintendent, because by doing so he has placed his individual case on the communal agenda of workplace relations:

Eh...he sniffed. I think the shop steward should speak.
Do you. The superintendent nodded. After a moment he said,
If you ask me son you regard yourself as a bit of a barrackroom
lawyer son. Is that how you see yourself?
Hines looked at him.
Is it?
No. (p. 208)

The Superintendent defines Hines within a clearly demarcated workplace hierarchy indicated by his use of the term 'son'. The tone of the exchange is pedagogic, reminiscent of a rebellious pupil being interrogated by the stern headmaster. In this sense, the exchange has important parallels with that between Doyle and Old Milne in *A Disaffection*, suggesting that school prepares ordinary working-class men and women for their submissiveness to come in adult life: submission before professional superiors as in *A*

Disaffection, or workplace management as in this case.

In *How Late It Was, How Late* the interrogator is the state apparatus and Sammy, who is the novel's central character novel, undergoes a series of extended interrogations by the police and security services. *How Late It Was, How Late* faces its readers with Sammy's resentful analysis of interpersonal relations between folk like him and those who represent the values of of dominant, middle-class society:

Thanks missus he said, but she didnay answer. Some of these middle-class bastards don't. They talk to ye and ye're allowed to reply but ye cannay speak unless spoken to. (p. 216)

Here Sammy is reflecting on an encounter with a doctor's receptionist, and the novel is perhaps even more explicit than *A Disaffection* or *The Busconductor Hines* in emphasising the submissiveness and degradation of ordinary men and women in contemporary British society. Interrogation is depicted as a constant strategy visited upon the powerless. Hines is interrogated by the Superintendent, Doyle by the pregnant silences of Old Milne, and in *How Late It Was, How Late* Sammy faces more literal interrogations. Through his incarceration by the security services, the novel's narrative directly explores the issues of state power and control. An 'English guy', whom the reader is led to presume, works for MI5 or MI6, betrays his vitriolic hatred for the working-class radicals with which Sammy has mixed. He tells a blind and powerless Sammy:

I meet these cunts and they don't talk about football...nothing like that, its all politics and they get angry and they get bitter, that's what you find Sammy...and what happens? They start talking about other things, and they talk about acts of violence and terrorism. (p. 178)

Language is central to these altercations with authority, but not, and this is crucial, the Scottish language above all else. Nationalism is not why Kelman unapologetically renders Glaswegian dialect. Unromantically representing the dialect of working-class Glasgow is an important but not overriding facet of representing everyday life. Indeed Kelman has been

explicit in his opposition to such a nationalistic interpretation of his novels. In an essay entitled 'The Importance Of Glasgow In My Work', he comments:

Glasgow just happens to be the city that I was born within and where some of my family, some of my relations, some of my friends and some of my neighbours happen to live. I could have been born anywhere in the world I suppose.¹²

Despite such deterrents, some critics, predictably, have chosen to pigeonhole Kelman as a Scottish writer above all else. [G] Karl Miller, for example, in his book *Authors*, constantly emphasises the peculiarly Scottish concerns of Kelman's novels. Typically, Miller categorises Doyle as one 'of the fantastic-depressive angry-and-otherwise Scots-Irish clan.'¹³ Gavin Wallace, similarly argues that Kelman epitomises the 'already spectacular tradition of despair,' which according to his account, is a characteristic peculiarly specific to the Scottish novel.¹⁴ Such explanations may be convenient for the critic, but they suffer from two deficiencies. Firstly, novels by Kelman occasionally attack such pigeonholing procedures. In *A Disaffection*, which Miller analyses at length, Doyle describes why he dislikes teaching an emblem of indigenous Scottish literature: *Wilson's Tales Of The Borders*:

Challenges you must always remain academic. Causes you can throw yourself into. The efficacy or otherwise of reprinting the full expurgated twenty-four volumes of Wilson's *Tales Of The Borders*. Tremendous. Earthshattering. Existencestopping. Lifebeginning. (p. 86)

This sarcastic tirade is used by Kelman to attack the political effects which spring from separating literature off from an active engagement with the social, political and cultural milieu in which it exists. This leads into the second deficiency: to characterise *A Disaffection*, or any other novel by Kelman, as essentially Scottish runs the political risk of appealing to facile English stereotypes about Scottishness, and about what the 'typical' Scottish novel is like.

Social class is another key issue which novels by Kelman engage with on both a literary and political level. Doyle, Sammy, Hines and the other characters who inhabit Kelman's fiction have transitory and uncertain social identities. Part-time petty criminals, disgruntled schoolteachers, social actors who are forever revolving on the boundaries of the social system to which they nominally belong. Because of this there are limitations to any description 'working class.' To begin with, many do not work being 'on the broo', or are on the point of 'fucking chucking it' like Doyle. Yet despite the unsuitability of the label working class, this does not mean that the concept of class has no bearing. Kelman makes it clear to the reader that the communities to which his fictional characters problematically belong, are still enscribed by a class system. In his novels the 'denizens of the district of D', 'D' standing for Drumchapel, have a particular vision of urban space which is informed by their perception of the social forces of a dominant society ranged against them.

Their perception of urban space is used by Kelman to highlight their everyday struggles for emotional, material and psychological survival in a society where 'folk were just getting chucked out on the streets these days; healthy or unhealthy it didn't matter.'¹⁵ *A Disaffection* closes with Doyle externalising his inner disaffection against this dominant society. Cowcaddons comes to symbolise 'the financial institutions of the Greatbritish Rulers', institutions which he is determined to assault by 'smashing in the windows of each and every one he chanced upon' (p. 335). An inner antipathy towards the national ruling class translates into physical action and the novel ends with a cathartic release for Doyle. *The Busconductor Hines* by contrast closes with a description of Hines passively wiping the condensation from the back window and looking out. This is used by Kelman to symbolise the provisional nature of his victory over the bus company and how temporary his reprieve probably is from a life on state benefits. Hines is reduced to a passive gaze, a powerless non-participant in a society which literally and metaphorically passes him by. Sammy, the central character of *How Late It Was, How Late*, indicates the purely functional, financially enforced minimalist attitudes of the

unemployed towards their urban environment. His necessities include, 'a wee row of shops, the minimarket, the betting shop, the chemist' (p. 80). To say, as the critic Adam Mars-Jones has, that such descriptions, constitute an 'arte poverta' [G] shows an absolute lack of comprehension for what everyday life is actually like for the urban unemployed in contemporary Britain.¹⁶

Kelman writes from the interior of such a culture and his determination to represent the lives, aspirations and perceptions of those within this culture is central. This goal works itself out in several different ways. Stylistically the use of interior monologue is designed to emphasise the rich inner mental lives which Sammy and other characters possess. It also allows Kelman to overcome a longstanding political and linguistic dilemma for the writer of a working-class novel: how to represent working-class language and life without resorting to a patronising third-person narrative. A narrative, that is, of the sort which provides explanations for the middle-class reader and offers the kind of exterior perspective which simply reinforces a belief that novelistic narratives belongs to what Doyle calls the 'Greatbritish Rulers.' This difficulty is made more acute by the fact that Kelman is also writing from the interior of a Scottish working-class culture. A centuries-old English linguistic and cultural hegemony exacerbates the task which Kelman has set himself.

Nevertheless it is a task at which he has excelled. As Cairns Craig has noted, free indirect discourse is one of the key technical devices which Kelman uses to overcome this potential problem.¹⁷ Use of free indirect discourse bequeaths a flexibility which allows the narrative to slide quickly between different perspectives. First person thought, and third person narrator interweave and intermingle in novels by Kelman and this creates a distinctive effect whereby the narrative voice can take on the characteristics of a speaking voice. [G]

This has two political effects. First, the narrative voice can explain the mental states or actions of characters in standard English and without creating a distance which suggests that standard English is somehow

'superior' to a Glaswegian working class-dialect. The narrative voice is allied with the voices of the characters which interrupt and inform it; there is no hint of superiority but rather a sense of comradeship. This is aided by absence of speech marks which are designed, as Cairns Craig argues, to help prevent the reader from switching between the narrative voice of a character and that of a represented character.¹⁸ Secondly, by preventing an easy distinction between written and spoken language, Kelman emphasises that the largely oral cultures of the working-class and other culturally marginalised groups are as poetic, and as valid, as written, 'official', print-culture.

Both strategies are exactly in line with Kelman's avowed aim of producing a contemporary fiction which is read by and produced for ordinary men and women who may, or may not, have a familiarity with fictional, written language in their everyday lives. In terms of narrative, novels by Kelman try to overcome such educational and cultural barriers, and although it would be extremely difficult to assess if this has been successful, there is some evidence that it has. Ken Garner in an article for *The Listener*, notes that Glaswegians seem to have embraced the egalitarian pretensions of Kelman's fiction:

Seasoned till-operatives in Glasgow bookshops will tell you how Kelman, uniquely, is bought by anyone and everyone - old ladies, bearded S.F. nutters, drunks; even lads nicking football books have been seen to run off with a Kelman. ¹⁹

Kelman has also successfully avoided two motifs of working-class fiction, both of which can be summed up as escapist. [G] In the first there is the depiction of a skilled working class whose ambitions and dreams are frustrated by the environment in which they toil, for example, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist* or *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*. The second, typically, depicts the tragic imprisonment of a working-class character who heroically fights to escape from a working-class environment. This can be seen in post-war British novels like *Kes*, *From Scenes Like These* and more recently, albeit in a manipulated form, in *London Fields* by Martin Amis.

In Amis's novel the narrative encourages readers to laugh at the working-class character Keith Talent as he dreams of becoming a professional dart-player and escaping his working-class life. Through Talent Amis can be seen to be satirising this escapist motif of British working-class fiction. But the novel is also a glaring example of the kind of literary-cultural class prejudices which Kelman fights to overcome because Amis's novel goes beyond satiring the logic of escapist working-class fiction and attacks the cultural habits of the working class generally. Keith Talent is a parody, and the reader perceives Talent's hopeless attempts to reach fame and fortune through the narrative of Sampson Young, an American novelist-to-be. Talent is not allowed to speak for himself through the narrative, he is perceived, judged and evaluated by Young's narrative. The result is that he becomes a middle-class stereotype of a cockney working-class wife-beater. Talent becomes more than a stereotypical individual and comes to stand as a satirical metaphor for the working classes in general. For example, Sampson describes Talent's diary in the following terms:

You cuold have a house so big you could have sevralt dart board areas in it , not just won. With a little light on top. (p. 177)

The misspellings are used to encourage the reader to laugh at Talent's illiteracy, and the implication is that the working-class, or at least the part of the working-class to which Keith Talent belongs, is made up of literary morons, cultural inadequates, and certainly not fully-rounded human beings. This stands in sharp contrast to the rendition of Sammy's fertile, if not officially educated, imagination:

Waiting rooms. Ye go into this room room where ye wait. Hoping's the same. One of these days the cunts'll build entire buildings just for that. Official hoping rooms, where ye just go in and hope for whatever ye feel like hoping for. Course they had them already: boozers. (pp. 212-213)

There are good historical reasons for the the lack of a defined working-class identity of characters within Kelman's fiction. Any description of a historically motivated, organised and unified Glaswegian proletariat would

be inappropriate given the kind of relationships which Sammy, Hines and Doyle have towards traditional pillars of working-class culture. None of Kelman's characters believes that hard work will allow them to make it up the social ladder, and collective action is a distant, almost unimaginable memory. Kelman describes a future after the urban relocation which Jeff Torrington's *Swing Hammer Swing!* describes, and he leads readers away from any romantic conclusions. In *A Disaffection*, Nicola, Doyle's sister-in-law sharply punctures his romantic view of life amid the towerblocks. Doyle asks Nicola, 'Have you ever been at the top of the Red Road Flats, beautiful looking down the Clyde valley and seeing Goat Fell in Arran?' To which she replies:

The Red Road Flats is an awful place to live. When I was at school at Balornock I had a friend and she had a cousin living there and her mother killed herself. (p. 315)

The novel ends with Doyle marooned at his brother's high-rise flat and forced to tramp home in the rain. This stresses the isolation of life out on 'the schemes' where an uncertain bus service simply underlines the social ostracisation of those who have been dumped on concrete reservations. This is the terminus for a class which has been declared redundant by the economic and political management of Great Britain P.L.C. Employment in the occupations which dominated the Clyde Valley, Shipbuilding and engineering, has gone, and Kelman describes a working-class culture which has fractured at its central pillar; employment in capitalist production, has shrivelled. In place of employment comes bitterness, summed up by Gavin's resentful attitude towards his brother Doyle:

Gavin didn't wish to speak to his younger brother, especially on the basis of equality. His young brother brother had a good sort of middle class job and a good sort of middle classish wage whereas he had fuck all. (pp. 302-303)

In these historical conditions it is hardly surprising that Doyle, Hines, Sammy or Tamas, the central character of *A Chancer*, stand in oblique relation to past British working-class fiction: there are no rousing shop

stewards, mass-protests or working-class Marxist intellectuals leading the proletariat to revolution. In place of a commitment to organised action comes the will simply to survive in such hostile conditions. Sammy sums this up with a kind of mantra; 'Ye do ye crime ye take ye time' (p.245). Doyle faces himself with the bitter exhortation 'Go and fuck yourself go and have a fucking wank in the bathroom' (p. 306). Peter, the central character of a short story entitled 'Streetsweeper', reflects, 'Diarrhoea that saviour of the working classes'.²⁰

Kelman's fiction also has a more precise political import. Waugh, in her survey of English literature since 1960, argues that the 1980s were a period when the British novel began to abandon realism [G] as a literary mode and turn increasingly to 'the fantastic'. She goes on to define some of these fantastic strategies as:

...the end of what Lucaks had seen as the representative typicality of the novel, the rise of the grotesque and eccentric, the break-up of universal representativeness into culturally differentiated styles and voices; the construction of cosmologies which defy space and time; the carnivalesque which disturbs ontological categorisation. ²¹

Waugh carefully connects such traits within the British novel with the political and social conditions of contemporary Britain. She points out: 'In a fragmenting society it seemed impossible to construct typical or representative characters, so some feared the demise of realism altogether'.²² Kelman reaches towards a working-class reinvention of realism [G] for the contemporary novel: a realism which gives a literary voice and means of expression for those who are on the edge of 'official' society.

Sammy, Doyle and Hines are not just marginalised. Kelman goes much further by indicating that they have been purposely abandoned and excluded by contemporary British society. This implication gives a dark dystopic edge to fiction by the author. *How Late It Was, How Late* provides a stark vision of a society in which, for powerless ordinary men and women,

the chances of empowerment and meaningful citizenship are increasingly closed off by state repression. This is something which is forcefully conveyed to readers by the dealings that Sammy has with state institutions. In a meeting with Doctor Crozier, a D.S.S. doctor, he is told:

As far as D.S.S Central Medical is concerned I dare say their adjudicating officer will require to determine a judgment. If the alleged dysfunction is verified then your claim for re-registration in respect of sightloss capacity will be allowed. (p. 224)

The passage, like all the language that Crozier uses, is a parody of bureaucratic jargon. The implication is that its purpose is to obstruct a blind and confused Sammy, and others like him, who are reliant on the Welfare State. *How Late It Was, How Late* indicates that the official humanitarian ideals of the British state have become a sham. In their place the novel represents a dark vision of ordinary men and women who have their everyday lives controlled and administered by 'the sodgers and the health and welfare'. Throughout his fiction Kelman faces his readers with the kind of characters who are the antithesis of an idealised official citizen, petty criminals like Sammy, rebellious public workers like Hines, or radical teachers like Doyle: exactly the kind of figures who have been singled out for demonisation by the popular press since 1979.

Given the extent of this social oppression, it is not surprising that the revolts by these disempowered ordinary men and women are confined to strategic, small-scale, struggles. Critics do not need to burrow for similarities between Sammy, Doyle or Hines and the protagonists of fiction by Kafka or Beckett. In *A Disaffection* Doyle comes to realise that his highflown forays into classical literature cannot alleviate his unsatisfactory life, cannot be resolved by 'straight bourgeois wank' (p. 306). The conclusion of the novel in which he provokes a chase from 'two polis' provides a far better sense of release than his earlier metaphysical musings. *How Late It Was, How Late* concludes with Sammy heading for England and hoping for a better life to come. Hines retains his job after his rebellion, his dignity intact. Any resistance in a society where 'cunts were getting chucked out on the streets'²³ assumes heroic proportions. It becomes heroic precisely because

the characters of Kelman's fiction do not have the organisational, legal, cultural or familial support which they might have. Struggle in these conditions has to assume small proportions as these characters act alone, arming themselves with fatalism 'yer do yer crime, yer take yer time,' or simply pleading diarrhoea.

Laughter and Anger: The Novels Of Iain Banks

Laughter has a considerable disruptive influence in novels by Banks. Humour is used to belittle and mock the serious. In *Complicity* Andy narrates his assassination with a mock seriousness. This serves to underline the horrific and explicit descriptions of the torture, mutilation and violent death of his victims. In *Espedair Street* the characters Quiss and Ajayi are plagued by crows, which we are informed, have the voices of hated ex-lovers. Frank in *The Wasp Factory* explains his murderous career with a deadpan line: 'it was just a stage I was going through' (p. 42). Black humour then has an important function because it creates a complex tension which can be best summarised by a favourite phrase of the Scottish writer Hugh MacDiarmid, 'the absolute propriety of a gargoyle's grinning at the elbow of a saint'.²⁴ But although this vein of black humour has a particularly Scottish and Irish set of literary precedents, humour in novels by Banks is part of a broader strategy which is anything other than peculiarly Scottish.

For one thing, his novels call upon several different types of humour. Prominent is a vein of Rabellesian crudity. [G] This can be seen in its most complex ironic form in *The Bridge*. The novel is punctuated by the narration of a barbarian speaking in Scots dialect. Significantly, the barbarian is interrupted by a familiar which sits on his shoulder and makes comments, in perfect English, on the stream of expletives with which the barbarian describes his adventures. Banks could be seen here to be satirising the stereotype of Scots dialect as plebeian and primitive. Novels by the author are shot though with a more direct vein of crudity in which bodily functions vomiting, excreting, and the results of excess, are described with slapstick

glee. Orr, a main character in *The Bridge* for example, describes a dream where he holds his penis 'like some stunted flagpole in front of me, running and shaking it,' and is tortured by images of carnival excess:

Orgies which go on for days and nights without pause; every form of sexual perversion is practised, red lights and open fires light the scene at night, and vast quantities of roasted meats, exotic fruits and spicy delicacies are consumed. (p. 146)

After a night of alcoholic excess, Cameron in *Complicity* humorously tells the reader 'God I hate it when my shit smells of whisky' (p. 144). Weir describes his adolescent body as 'seething with semen and pus and ideas' (p. 12). *Walking On Glass* ends with Graham Park staring at magazine image of 'a women's buttocks, over a pair of hairy knees. The women's bottom was reddened slightly; there was a hand poised, too obviously poised, in motion over her' (p. 237). At the end of *Walking On Glass* Park's disaffection is disclosed to readers through the metaphor of corporeal sensations:

his tongue, that instrument of articulation, felt like a great poisoned sac, some gland caught full of all the body's wastes and debris, tight with putrid volume, ripe as any bloated carcass. (p. 239)

Humorous excess and laughter caused by bodily functions, can easily turn into disgust and, as here, becomes a metaphor for the sheer grubbiness of human society, or 'the sheer filthy mundanity of it all' as Park summarises (p. 238). Unstable edges are typical of novels by Banks, and this sense of precariousness is epitomised by his second published novel, *Walking On Glass*.

Walking On Glass can be seen, almost entirely, as an ironical and mocking play upon literary technique and style. The novel begins by introducing its reader to Graham Park, who almost immediately figures as a self-obsessed, egotistical and naive anti-hero. For example, Park has a self-enforced social quarantine from London's society:

He had opted for the cynical, guarded approach, and now he could see that for all the safety it had brought him - here he was, in his second year, still solvent, heart intact, unmugged and succeeding in his studies, despite all his mother's fears - every defence had its price, and he had paid in a separating distance, incomprehension. (p. 13)

Park's own explanation is brimming with a cosy, self-centered certainty which the novel by its end, dutifully punctures. Significantly, Park is an art student and as such Banks mischievously uses Park's character defects as a metaphor for the values of institutionalised serious Art: self-obsessed, egotistical, and self indulgent.

Walking On Glass is a composite of different generic styles, and it includes a romantic sub-plot which Banks satirically manipulates. Indeed, deception and corruption are key motifs in the novel. The reader follows Park as he obsessively dotes upon Sarah Ffitch, dreaming of romance, but Park's hopes are satirically destroyed and the way in which Banks handles their destruction can be seen as a barbed comment about the values promoted by some romantic fiction. [G] The reader, like Park, is led to believe that the outrageously camp character, Slater, is gay. But the reader discovers that Slater is actually Sarah Ffitch's brother and that both of them are ironically having a heterosexual, but incestuous romance. To enhance the satirical effect Banks has Slater flippantly and humorously describe their incest: 'Sarah is my sister and we've had (horror of horrors) an incestuous relationship for the last six years (blame single sex schools, I say)' (p. 207). The last description of Slater and Ffitch subversively undermines the same kind of romantic, heterosexual values by emphasising the bodily passions and excretions of their perverted sexual activity: 'Sarah took another Kleenex from the box under the bed, dabbed at herself, then put the soggy tissues in the small split-cane bin' (p. 207). Park's romantic fantasies are satirically deflated at the very end of *Walking On Glass*, as he stares at 'a soiled and tattered wanking mag and chopped domestic animal,' which lie by the side of an inner-city canal (p. 205). *Walking On Glass* begins with romantic idealism and ends in a self-mocking and highly stylised bathos. Such inversions of categories are central to the ironic aura which

permeates the novel and readers are left with the feeling that nothing is pure or romantic in the real world.

Walking On Glass is also filled with literary allusions and conundrums which tease its reader. The novel has two narrative streams which seem to be set within the recognisably realistic world of London at some point in the 1980s. It also has a third narrative stream which seems to be set at some distant point in the future or in another dimension altogether. In this narrative world Quiss and Ajayi sit in lonely exile in a setting which is more typical of a novel from the science fiction or fantasy genres. To confuse and confound the reader still more, *Walking On Glass* ends by entangling and merging these three fictional world, although up to this point it is unclear how they can possibly be connected.

The novel self-consciously manipulates its reader's expectations in order to create a dramatic tension. This tension derives from the possibility that its author, either will not, or cannot, provide anything more than tantalising glimpses of how Grout, Quiss, and Park are connected. Participating in these games is central to the paradoxical reason why *Walking On Glass* is maddeningly complex and enigmatically attractive at the same time. It is also why the novel is so entertaining and Banks heightens this entertainment by facetiously testing the reader's literary knowledge. For example, Ajayi discovers that the castle in which she is imprisoned is built almost entirely from books of all kinds, but particularly novels. Near the end of *Walking On Glass* she discovers that books make up the very table at which she and Quiss have been endlessly and fruitlessly, trying to solve a cryptic puzzle and earn their freedom: '*Titus Groan*' she read, talking softly to herself. *The Castle. Labyrinths, The Trial...* and another book, which had the title-page missing'(p. 232).

The book with its missing title-page, and which Ajayi dutifully reads, is Park's narrative at the beginning of *Walking On Glass*. At this point and at others, Banks draws attention to possible literary precedents for his novel: *The Castle* by Franz Kafka, Mervyn Peake's *Gormenghast* fantasy, and H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine*. The way in which such precedents are

obviously highlighted, and the motif of puzzles which cannot be solved, leaves the reader with the gnawing suspicion that Banks is mocking the literary practice of finding literary precedents for what is categorised as serious, quality fiction. Novels by the author are designed to disrupt such academic and critical practice.

Humour is ambiguously double edged within the novel. For example, the reader is encouraged to laugh at Stephen Grout, particularly at his social inadequacies. Within his narrative Grout appears to be suffering from paranoid delusions and his conviction that he is the victim of 'inter-dimensional tormentors' seems laughably implausible, precisely because he seems to exist in the same realistic setting as Park, Sarah Ffitch, and Slater. But by the end of the novel Banks supplies hints that Grout is actually correct. The Grout narrative therefore uses its manipulation of reader expectations to draw attention to the artificiality of distinctions which are usually used to favour realistic fictional representations or genres and demean non-realistic [G] popular genres like science fiction and fantasy. By inverting its readers suppositions that Grout is either mad or lying, and by creating uncanny parallels between his perception and the world in which Quiss and Ajayi exist, the novel draws attention to the arbitrary nature of divisions between realistic and fantastic fiction. Banks mischievously connects these two arguments through an evocative description of Grout's room which is:

full of books; thick dog-eared, broken spined, gaudy-covered paperbacks. They lay on the floor, stacked on their sides because he didn't have any proper shelves. The floor of his room was like a maze, with tower blocks of books, whole walls of them set out on the holed linoleum so that only small corridors for him to walk in remained between them. (p. 30)

Park significantly tells the reader that his voracious literary appetite is based on his conviction that clues as to the whereabouts of the 'the key' will lie hidden in the most 'fantastic, unrealistic fiction' (p. 30). Park therefore figures as a parody of a demented literary critic, obsessively ferreting out significance from every written word, but in an ironic reversal, a literary critic who values the most trashy and unrealistic fantasy and science fiction.

Walking On Glass seeks to persuade its reader that all fiction relies to some extent upon agreed, but nevertheless arbitrary, rules of representation which are recognised by both reader and a writer. In this sense the narrative of *Walking On Glass* seems to have the last laugh by inverting these categories, but it is an inversion which is at its reader's expense.

Walking On Glass also contains more direct and pointed literary comment. Slater explains his ideas for a novel to a sceptical Park and the dialogue is used by Banks to satirise prevalent ideas about the trashy, low-quality nature of science fiction and fantasy fiction:

'Imagine if you will,' Slater said dramatically, sweeping his arms out wide,
'a -'
'Keep it short,' Graham told him.
'Slater looked hurt. 'It's a sort of Byzantine future, a degenerate technocratic empire with - '
'Oh, not science fiction again.' (p. 15)

Later in the novel Park picks up a volume by the comedy science fiction author Douglas Adams and Banks uses this action to re-emphasise his criticisms about the culturally elitist nature of divisions between quality and non-quality fiction. Park's reaction conveys these criticisms: 'He put the book down. Although it was funny, it was rather *light* reading. He wanted Sara to find him reading something more impressive' (p. 189, original italics).

The emphasis on light reading and Park's desire to be seen reading something more impressive hammers home these criticisms. *Walking On Glass* derides what it depicts as the puritanical divisions between serious and non-serious, quality and non-quality fiction. The novel discloses that such divisions are used to reinforce the social and cultural prestige of those who read what the literary establishment defines as 'impressive', 'serious' literature. Park's admission, 'it was funny', provides a crucial clue which explains a number of characteristics about novels by Banks. Park cannot be

seen reading anything by Douglas Adams because Adams is a popular science fiction writer. Novels by Banks are shot through with a vein of popular, oppositional culture, which is used to knock the practices and values of serious culture.

In *The Bridge*, the barbarian's narrative can be seen as a satire on high literary culture. The barbarian describes his adventures in the Underworld and by doing so his narrative satirically echoes *The Odyssey*. But his use of an exaggerated Scots dialect creates an effect of bathos through a descent from a culturally elevated form of epic poem into the ramblings of ordinary description. This satirical effect can be seen in one of the poems which puncture the barbarian's description of a voyage into the underworld:

My first is in day but never in night,
My second's in dark but unseen in light;
My middle's a twin in daughter, not son,
While the fifth's, not in two, but in three and one;
The final's in first, not middle or last,
And my whole is in sheath; got an Elastoplast? (p. 160)

The last line shatters the seriousness of the poem. 'Elastoplast' introduces a term from everyday, vernacular language, a throwaway, disposable brand of plaster. In doing this, the poem is creating a sharp, satirical contrast between throwaway everyday popular culture and high literary culture. [G] This contrast is used by Banks throughout his novels for different effects. *Walking On Glass* teeters on the edge of being either a serious exploration of how different fictional and generic worlds can collide, or an entirely non-serious, disrespectful skit upon different fictional techniques and genres. In *Espedair Street* the popular form of the novel, a rock biography, is contrasted with its content. Weir's narrative is highly poetic.

The novel begins with Weir describing his intended suicide thus:

I might head south to Corryvreckan, to be spun inside its
whirlpool and listen with my waterlogged deaf ears to its mile-
wide voice ringing over the wave race; or be borne north, to
where the white sands sing and coral hides, pink-fingered and

hard-soft beneath the ocean swell. (p. 1)

Yet the form of the novel is based upon a rock biography, a popular form of writing which is rarely, if ever, considered to be 'serious' literature. In this way, *Espedair Street* challenges the literary expectations of a potential reader by injecting a poetic and highly literary narrative into a popular form.

Humour is at the forefront of this disruptive strategy, and one of the ways in which Banks's novels create humour is by focusing on British social attitudes. *Walking On Glass* satirises the politically reactionary attitudes prevalent in elements of the working-class. In doing so the novel punctures liberal or left-wing assumptions that the working-class is intrinsically politically correct because it is at the bottom of the class system. Grout meets Mr Sharpe, who, the narrative informs us, is the resident drunk in a local pub and who can be seen as a metaphor for degraded and politically reactionary elements of the working class:

These fuckin' Trotskyists they talk about bosses an' that, but they don't know nuffink, do they? I know, cos one of my nephews; 'e's a trotskyist, isn't e? Little can; I nearly knocked is' bleedin' teeth out last time I saw' im; only tryin' to tell me I was one of them racialists, wasn't e? I said 'lissen son' I said 'I ve' worked with blacks an' I've even made friends with some of them, which is prob'ably more than you've ever done, an' I quite liked some of them; they was Jamaicans not these Pakkie cans they was okay, but that does not alter the fact that there's too many of them over ere', an that don't make me a racist, now, does it?' (p. 160)

The representation of Mr Sharpe, both in terms of his Cockney dialect and his attitudes, is a parody. But the humour of the parody relies on tacit recognition by the reader, that such attitudes exist, that for example, 'Pakkie' is derogatory racist but nevertheless popular generic term for British citizens originally from the Indian subcontinent. Also that 'cans' is the plural of the popular term cunt: a term which is frequently as offensive to women as Pakki is to those from South Asia.

Walking On Glass, like all the novels by Iain Banks, to a lesser or greater extent relies upon the underground or popular cultural knowledge of its reader to create such humour. Mr Sharpe is funny because he is an exaggerated, but nevertheless believable, representation of the underground and unpleasant aspects of popular culture: racism, sexism and gross political incorrectness. This is why the elements of popular culture which Banks introduces into his novels are disruptive. Banks does not select the most palatable and politically or ethically acceptable strands within popular culture for the reader of his novels. Rather, popular culture in the 1980s and 1990s is displayed and explored in all its aspects.

Espedair Street is an extended examination of popular culture [G] in contemporary western societies and the novel can be seen to connect with some central issues within current debates over cultural evaluation which were examined in Chapter One. For example, the name of Weir's band, Frozen Gold, is an ironic comment on the capitalist basis of organised popular culture, and Weir's narrative of how Frozen Gold rose to 'big houses, fast cars and sleek women, fame and fortune' is used to emphasise the financial intricacies of the popular music industry, and, specifically, how such industries rely upon highly premeditated and subtle forms of consumer manipulation. Through this route, *Espedair Street* sharply reminds its reader that popular culture is anything but spontaneous, oppositional or romantic, and in this sense the novel could be said to support Hoggart's arguments about the inauthentic character of much mass culture. Weir describes a meeting with his record company manager, Rick Tumbler:

A few years ago I asked Rick Tumbler again why even when we had a perfectly good mix on an album, ARC always re-mixed the songs before issuing them as singles. Rick grinned the way people do before they put a Royal Running Flush down on your three aces. 'For the singles album, Danny Boy,' he told me 'your real fans'll buy everything you've ever released, but some real fans never buy 45s; they wouldn't buy a singles album either, if they already had all the material on the albums they've already bought, so we make all the mixes different and then they have to buy the singles album too and so you and I make even more

money than we would have anyway .' (p. 95)

Espedair Street casts a critical eye over contemporary cultural relations. Weir himself is used to focus on the contradictions inherent within any notion of genuine popular culture in western societies. Weir stresses that the capitalist basis of western societies ultimately reduce all cultural products to sales figures and the 'mathematical filigree of production' (p. 198). Yet, in contradiction, Weir believes that some genres of music can transcend the base values of public image or capitalist rationale of sales figures. The novel ends with him listening to the 'simple, tootling, jiggling music' of Northumbrian pipes, (p. 198), and this simple, uncommercialised sub-genre of folk music is symbolically linked to his own newfound sense of emotional peace.

The novel can also be seen as a veiled examination of fiction writing. Weir, significantly, is a songwriter and the novel is peppered with lyrical prose. He assumes, like the stereotypical image of a writer, both a distanced and critical perspective on the British society around him. Rather than the stereotypical writer's garret, Banks ironically provides Weir with a Victorian folly. Weir's narrative emphasises his reason for living in his folly: 'to retreat from the world at large' (p. 33). Like the fiction writer, Weir provides his audience with a narrative which is simultaneously intensely personal and public, autobiographical and purely fictional. He writes songs which are popular but which also aim for some cultural permanence. Weir comments that nothing is as 'reliable and durable as a good tune' and is shown to have a professional, artistic pride in songwriting as a skill.

Finally, the autobiographical form of *Espedair Street* reinforces the fictive illusion that its central character is writing his own story and that Iain Banks, the author, is simply enabling this larger-than-life ex-rock star to convey his mental and emotional life to the reader. Banks skilfully fosters this sense of character autonomy at the end of the first chapter. Weir advertises his own freedom to narrate and the reader is cajoled:

So come on down, roll up, come along, come in, sit down, and
shut up, calm down and listen up...join me now (hey gang, let's

do the show right here!)).join me now as we journey into the past
that is the teaming thoroughfare that is...(you guessed). (p. 11)

Through its central character, Banks introduces an element of literary self-consciousness into *Espedair Street*. The novel can be interpreted as a meditation on the political-artistic dilemmas facing the novelist in the 1980s and 1990s and like *Walking On Glass*, it bases this literary self-consciousness around arguments about quality/non-quality divisions within cultural forms. Through Weir's politicised analysis of popular culture, Banks draws attention to a dilemma which also faces politically or critically concerned novelists: whether to aim for a popular genre and be condemned to the label low quality, or whether to embrace high literary aims and a small coterie audience. Kelman's fiction can also be seen in relation to this problem, and I expand on how both novelists approach it in Chapter Three and in my Conclusion.

Weir's socialist perspective is also used to make a veiled attack on the links between cultural prestige and class prestige. After a description of how record companies manipulate consumers, Weir describes the psychological and cultural differences between classes. He likens Rick Tumbler's explanation of record company long-term strategies to a middle class psychology; 'That's middle-class thinking. That's looking ahead. The middle classes are brought up like that,' he explains to the reader (p. 95). He continues:

But there are common denominators everywhere. I can remember when it was a matter of real importance to know of a group more obscure than your friends knew about; not just any group, but a band playing *progressive* music. If that band then went on to become famous (even though that would be regarded as selling out) then your status as a person of immense taste was assured. Its called gambling or investing. (p. 95, original italics)

Banks draws his readers' attention to the links between cultural capital and social capital: how knowledge about and possession of the right cultural

products can enhance the social prestige of their consumer. *Espedair Street's* narrative also emphasises that this device is integral to socially and culturally, divided capitalist societies and is a mechanism by which these divisions are reproduced at an everyday level. In this way Banks points out that striving for 'distinction' is not unique to high culture, but rather a universal activity. Like Park in *Walking On Glass* the important thing is to be seen to be aspiring to these universalised middle-class values.

Espedair Street is an extension and development of the literary, and broader cultural, criticisms which can also be seen in *The Bridge* and *Walking On Glass*. Resisting these forces is central to the novels of Iain Banks and at the core of why novels by this author could be said to be self-conscious: that is, aware of the conditions of literary production and consumption which surround them. Here is also an explanation as to why novels by the author consistently evade or disrupt the literary categories which might be used to decide their literary status.

Novels by Iain Banks conduct a sustained criticism of prominent values and beliefs within contemporary British society. This is achieved by using the sort of popular genres which are usually considered to be incapable or unworthy of such a task. In doing so, novels by the author mischievously knock the kind of stereotypes which are usually ascribed to such popular genres and attempt to demonstrate that popular genres, like the thriller, are more than capable of pushing forward a substantive examination of serious social and political issues. This complex relationship between criticism of literary value-systems and political/social criticism can be seen throughout Banks's novels and it is a relationship which can be seen to develop chronologically.

The genesis of this relationship can be traced back to *The Bridge* which was Banks's second published novel. *The Bridge* has two main narrative streams. Like *Walking On Glass*, realism and the fantasy genre co-exist within the novel and Banks uses their enigmatic relationship in order to

tease its readers. *The Bridge* continues the motifs of complexity and conundrum. One narrative is set in the recognisable world of lowland Scotland as it follows the life of Lennox through into the late 1970s, while the other takes the reader into the fantasy Bridgeworld society through the narrative of Orr and, like *Walking On Glass*, *The Bridge* eerily merges and entangles these two narratives. In this sense, and in common with *Walking On Glass*, Banks could be said to be drawing attention to the artificiality of distinctions between realistic and non-realistic genres. But unlike *Walking On Glass*, Banks uses the technique to achieve wide-ranging criticisms of contemporary British society.

Orr proves to be an exasperating patient for his psychotherapist and the bureaucratic social system of the Bridgeworld. Because of his uncooperative attitudes toward the medical authorities, Orr is declassified and he finds himself ostracised from the social circles in which he formerly moved. Banks uses this turn of events to highlight the class system of the Bridgeworld society, specifically the gap in living standards between classes. Orr's downward social trajectory is starkly contrasted with that of Lennox in his realistic narrative. But this serves to highlight similarities between the two societies, because, unlike Orr, Lennox obeys the rules of his society and the narrative displays the results: upward social and material mobility.

But although Lennox becomes increasingly affluent and successful the narrative indicates that this outward success conceals an inner turmoil. In fact, Lennox becomes ever more alienated, frustrated and dissatisfied as he becomes ever more successful in terms of his career and financial income. Orr, by contrast, and despite his initial sense of shock, only manages to find any sense of personal satisfaction after he has been declassified. It is also at this point when the Orr narrative becomes much more dynamic, as Orr embarks upon a series of adventures which takes him away from and then eventually back to the Bridgeworld society. This stands in sharp contrast to the Lennox narrative which becomes ever more bleak in tone, deadpan in its descriptions, or simply uncommunicative as Lennox himself becomes ever more disenchanted with his own life. The tone of the Lennox and Orr

narratives strengthens the allegorical bond between them by stylistically echoing the respective mental and emotional states of their central characters.

The novel indicates that not obeying the rules can be the only strategy which can sustain any kind of emotional and psychological wellbeing for the individuals who live in societies like the Bridgeworld or our own. By implication, this highlights what is wrong with the societies which force their citizens into this position and *The Bridge* also makes more straightforward criticisms of British society. The Bridgeworld can be seen as a dystopic reflection of British society in the 1980s. For example, communication itself has fractured along class lines. Orr informs the reader that 'in any single section of the bridge, there are anything up to a dozen different languages; specialised jargons originated by the various professions and skill groups over the years and developed and added to, altered and refined to the point of mutual incomprehensibility'(p.33). In the Bridgeworld society a bureaucratic, technocratic elite rule, rather than any truly democratic representatives or institutions. A political point echoed by Lennox as he attacks the, 'unelected xenophobic reactionaries!' who control the game of cold war bluff in the parallel western world:

Why don't I get a vote? He raged. My dad lives spitting distance from Coulport, Faslane and the Holy Loch; if that buffoon's liver-spotted finger hits the button my old man's dead; probably all of us; you, me, Andrea and the kids; everybody I love...So why the fuck, don't I get a vote. (p. 246 Original Italic)

Orr also describes a society in which social elites abide by rigid social rules and are unable to think beyond these parameters. These psychic fetters are metaphorically perceived by Orr in his disturbing visions of the bridge superstructure in the most banal or intimate moments. This is a physical metaphor for social and psychic atrophy which is echoed by Lennox's description of his origins in 'the west of the country, in the industrial heartland which was already failing, silting up with cheap fat, starved of energy, clogging and clotting and thickening and threatening' (p. 101). This is also conveyed in an absurd exchange between Orr and the

engineer Mr Brook, on the subject of un-scheduled flights by aircraft. Orr asks:

Are there laws against what they did?

There's no law to *permit* it, Orr that's the point. Good grief man, you can't have people going off and doing something just because they want to, just because they think something up! You have to have a...framework' He shakes his head. 'God you have some odd ideas at times, Orr. (p. 48, original italics)

Above all Orr describes a society to the reader which is both familiar yet strangely different. These uncanny parallels gives a disturbing, estranging quality to the Bridgeworld narrative. This fits in well with the kind of dystopic refractions which the novel makes between the Bridgeworld society and contemporary British society. In this sense *The Bridge* relies heavily on a particular sense of reader-recognition for sustaining its allegorical relationship between these two societies: a recognition that the Bridgeworld is subtly different from and subtly similar to British society and its culture. Like *Walking On Glass*, *The Bridge* allegory feeds upon the instabilities and tensions which emerge from its uncertain relationship to the realistic Lennox narrative, achieved by richly metaphorical cross-currents between these two societies.

The Orr narrative is also used by Banks to make a metaphorical prediction about the future of British society if it follows its current agenda. Near the end of the novel Orr returns to the Bridgeworld after his excursions and discovers that the entire society has vanished. All that remains is the rotting superstructure of the bridge itself, as it succumbs to arid desert sands. In the light of the allegorical relationship which I described above, the metaphor of a society succumbing to atrophy is politically potent. It is a metaphor for a British society either perishing under the weight of the spiritually arid ideologies of monetarism and state-encouraged private greed or a self-induced nuclear catastrophe. At the end of the novel the reader is left to conclude that Orr and the Bridgeworld were probably phantasms from Lennox's mind as he lay in a crash-induced coma. A disembodied voice emerges to signify a consciousness at the crossroads

between the Bridgeworld and the reader's world. The voice specifies what, up to this point, have been metaphorical parallels:

Oh God, back to Thatcher's Britain and Reagan's world, back to all the usual bullshit. At least the bridge was predictable in its oddness, at least it was comparatively safe.

The voice adds:

The choice is not between dream and reality; it is between two different dreams. One is my own; the Bridge and all I made of it. The other is my collective dream, our corporate imagery. We live the dream: call it American, call it Western, call it Northern...I was part of one dream, for good or ill, and it was half nightmare and I almost let it kill me. (p. 283)

The half-nightmare which Lennox refers to is everyday existence in contemporary society: life in a social system which idolises its rich and powerful, promotes inequality, and to borrow a memorable phrase from *Complicity*, is predicated upon an 'ocean of global barbarity'.

Weir, central character of *Espedair Street*, is also nearly killed by this half-nightmare. Weir plans his own suicide and the cause of his misery is the same spiritual impoverishment suffered by Lennox. As a rock star he has lived the 'good life' promoted by the corporate imagery of capitalism, but like Lennox, discovered that the glitzy packaging conceals a spiritual and moral void. Banks uses the emotional state of both characters to criticise the materialist rationality which underpins capitalist society.

Espedair Street is also critical of the class system in contemporary Britain. Weir is working-class and is shown to have spent his deprived childhood in one of Glasgow's poorer estates. Banks uses his background as a vehicle for examining class differences in British society, specifically how the lifestyles and aspirations of the middle-class are alien to their poorer working-class neighbours. Before joining the musicians who eventually become 'Frozen Gold', Weir watches one of their performances and is amazed at their musical virtuosity, as well as their confidence. After meeting

them afterwards, Weir feels socially and musically inadequate. He realises that they, unlike him, have grown up in an environment which encourages confidence, musical ability, educational achievement and high self-expectations. About his new acquaintances he bitterly comments: 'The bastards; the smug middle class shits' (p. 47).

Weir's analysis is also used to underline the unequal distribution of wealth and resources in contemporary Britain. In contrast to Frozen Gold's other members, Weir comes from an environment which is cramped, cheaply furnished and depressing. On a visit to one of the home of one of their parents, he notes how it has 'a kitchen the size of my ma's living room, but far better furnished' and a 'double garage about the size of our flat' (p. 46). In Chapter Five (and Appendix B) I examine the way in which Banks's novels represent class and I shall concentrate on *The Crow Road* because this novel is the most sustained examination of several motifs and aspects which run through Banks's novels.

The Crow Road begins and ends with a clear focus on human continuity. It begins with the death of Grandma Margot, who is the matriarch of the Mc Hoan family, and concludes with the newest addition to the family opening his eyes and perhaps seeing, 'Gallanach with its quays and spires and serried streets and out to the crumpled hills beyond the brindle of forests to the East and the glitter of waves to the west, where the ocean was' (p. 501).

Births, deaths, and growth are central to the novel's examination of place, family and history. Fairly early on the novel signifies the almost mystical meanings of these three motifs through the memories of its narrator and central character, Prentice Mc Hoan. In a flashback sequence the reader is alerted to the mystical meaning of family:

D'you feel for this family Prentice?
Feel for it Gran?
Does it mean anything to you. She looked cross.
Anything beyond giving you a place to stay. (p. 11)

As the exchange implies Margot means more than viewing family as a

biological set of relations. Family comes to be resolved in *The Crow Road* as the root of communal identity, as a source of generational continuity and adjustment. In the novel narrative itself is the most obvious carrier of this continuity as Prentice narrates his transition from childhood to manhood. The plot of the novel consists of these rites of passage for Prentice and the publisher's blurb on the inside cover of the 1992 hardback edition takes this as its central salesploy.

Iain Banks' new novel describes recurrent rites of passage in a complex but enduring Scottish family. His central preoccupations with death, sex, drink, God, illegal substances and the motor car are lovingly embedded in his rich descriptions of the Scottish landscape.

The blurb continues:

with *The Crow Road* ...the author has come home.

The Crow Road concludes with a beginning: a new life. By doing so it emphasises that the story, literally, goes on. Weir ends *Espedair Street* 'feeling happy again and wondering if it'll last' (p. 299). *Walking On Glass* also closes with Park on the edge of a new and less self-assured life: 'He walked off; away from the canalside, back towards the little gate, towards the city again' (p. 239). *The Bridge* is concluded by a new consciousness as Lennox wakes from his coma, and the narrative indicates that this awakening is a metaphor for a happier narrative ahead.

In this way the personal growth of a character is intertwined with a fictive growth, and novels by Banks advertise their provisional and unfinished form. By doing so they also refuse any status as finished or definitive works of fiction. This is perfectly in keeping with their emphasis on the pleasures and forms of popular culture. Like the cigarettes which Colley, the main character of *Complicity*, finds so momentarily pleasurable but which leave him wanting more, Banks's novels echo a central characteristic of contemporary popular culture: its temporary, and unfinished energy. Unlike Harold Bloom, Banks does not reject this culture: he seeks to engage with

its energy and to mark out a politically and ethically informed centre.

The Crow Road, in common with other novels by Banks, uses its bildungsroman form to comment on certain aspects of the society outside Gallanach. The Gulf War begins during the novel's timespan and Prentice comments:

I was already starting to get bored with the twin blue-pink glowing cones of RAF Tornados' afterburners as they took off into the night, and even the slo-mo footage of the exciting Brit-made JP-233 runway-craterering package scattering bomblets and mines with the demented glee of some Satanic Santa.
(p. 443)

The Crow Road, like *Complicity*, emphasises how everyday life in British society is interrupted by the unreal and fractured narratives of the electronic media. Novels by Banks try to gain some kind of purchase on such an image-driven, technological and technologically-obsessed media sub-society, which as Prentice is used to emphasise, is increasingly powerful within British social and cultural life generally. Like Colley in *Complicity*, his perceptions are used to highlight the way in which ordinary people process fractured and temporary, image-driven media narratives. Prentice is also used by Banks to emphasise how ordinary people appropriate and subvert such information in order to address their local political and social concerns. Media reports of the Gulf War are used to mischievously satirise the link between linguistic and political priorities. How 'Places like Bah' rain and Dah' rain were rolled confidently off the tongue by newsreader after newsreader' in London but how the 'soft *ch* sound' did not extend to their pronunciation of Scottish Lochs (p. 443).

Literary mischief is also present in *The Crow Road*, in common with other novels by its author. There are parallels between the novel and *A Scots Quair* by Lewis Grassie Gibbon. Both novels focus on the transition of their central character from childhood to maturity, both set this transition against a background of lowland Scottish society. Banks and Gibbon each weave the history of a community and a family, together with that of their central

respective characters: Prentice for the McHoans, and Chris Guthrie for the broader family of the crofter folk.

But such parallels are, at best, limited. Like the Cauldhames in *The Wasp Factory*, the McHoans and their in-laws, the Urvills, are the respected notables of Gallanach. By contrast, Chris Guthrie is brought up amid the poor crofter folk who struggle to farm their unproductive land. Banks quickly draws attention to the commanding place that the McHoans and Urvills have in the local social hierarchy. Prentice explains that: 'My great-great-great grandfather, Stewart McHoan, was buried in a coffin made from black glass by the craftsmen he had commanded in his capacity as manager of the Gallanach Glass works' (p. 16). He concludes 'a post now held by my Uncle Hamish,' and another family member, Fergus, is central to the reason why the *Larousse Dictionary Of Writers* description of *The Crow Road* as 'incorporating familiar motifs and themes of Scottish writing,' is misleading.²⁵ Fergus's character is central to the thriller sub-plot prominent within the novel and the thriller could hardly be said to be a peculiarly Scottish literary form. Such potentially misleading or simply mischievous literary allusions and echoes are typical of Banks's novels.

The Mc Hoans have a missing family member called Rory who is the brother of Prentice's father Kenneth. Prentice attempts to track down the mysteriously missing Rory and as the novel progresses, readers via the narrative of Prentice, are taken through an examination of family politics. Small sections of dialogue and description by an unnamed third-person narrator, as well as the investigations of Prentice, direct readers to the conclusion that Rory has been murdered. The reader learns that Fergus is implicated and the novel becomes a complex detective story as well as a thriller.

The complex plot of *The Crow Road* is used by Banks to pursue the set of motifs which I set out earlier in this Chapter. Fergus's characterisation is used to criticise capitalist values. Prentice's father, Kenneth, tells a sulking Fergus:

When Tories say freedom they mean money; freedom to send

your child to a private school means the money to send your child to a private school. The freedom to invest in South Africa means the money to invest there so you can make even more. (p. 243)

Fergus is depicted as the regressive, narrow-minded representative of a class, of the 'factory owning Scottish gentry,' as Kenneth calls the McHoans and Urvills. Fergus is the managing director and chief investor of the ailing Gallanach glass factory and he is depicted as an old-fashioned owner-investor capitalist, who puts 'church and the factory above family and friends' (p. 243).

The Crow Road sets out the effects of this abandonment of family and friendship. In common with Banks's other novels, popular generic conventions are used as a potent political vehicle and in order to emphasise the self-destructive effects which spring from commitment to capitalist, materialist ideals. Fergus loses the love and affection of those around him, a loss which is symbolically externalised when he discovers his wife Fiona making love with Lachy Watt, Prentice's friend:

He felt very cold and he had pissed himself. The urine was warm around his balls and tepid down his leg, but it was cold at his knees. He knelt there in the darkness listening to the sounds of the subsiding passion below. (p. 285)

This chill is a metaphor for a failure of human contact. Fergus has forsaken the love of his wife and the closeness of his family for the cold embrace of capitalist ideology. He has become, so the reader is led to conclude, little more than an animal: cold, alone, disconsolate, yet vengeful. Fergus is only able to listen to the sound of other people's expressions of love and contact, listen to his wife's infidelity.

The Crow Road sets up a stark contrast between the official values of capitalist British society and the unofficial local bonds of family and community. The thriller plot draws its readers attention to their incompatibility. Fergus's values, his belief in possessive individualism, material acquisition, and social inequality, are shown to have a corrosive

effect on the environment which is necessary for some viable sense of community: co-operation, cohesion, continuity, tolerance and compassion. Like *Complicity*, published just a year later, *The Crow Road* uses thriller conventions and the theme of violent murder to underline this argument for its readers.

Banks deftly connects this wider ideological conflict with a long-standing division within the McHoans. Prentice is unable to accept his father's atheist rationalism and this difference of opinion is summed up at the beginning of the novel by Grandma Margot:

People react more than they act Prentice, she said eventually.
Like you and your dad; he raises you to be a good little atheist
and then you go and get religion. (p. 11)

Banks creates a number of subtle parallels between Prentice and Fergal. Both characters are engaged in a stubborn rebellion against the values of those around them. Fergal is the lone Scottish Tory among both families. Prentice rebels against the values of paternal authority. *The Crow Road* indicates that rebellion without direction can quickly turn to irrationalism, and in the novel manifestations of irrationalism, madcap religion, offending family members for the sake of it, or the ultimately irrational act, the murder of kin, are depicted as divisive forces. Divisive that is, because they are shown to disrupt the kind of dialogue, open-mindedness and caring attitude towards others which the novel indicates can be the only basis for a community. For the reader, rationalism is aligned with the values which sustain family and community, and the novel defines rationalism within these same terms. By its end *The Crow Road* has become didactic and deeply political.

Prentice's father is killed by lightning and Fergus commits suicide rather than face the legal consequences of his actions. These two events near the end of the novel are highly significant: the manner and circumstances of each death point towards the kind of conclusions that the reader is asked to accept regarding rationalism versus irrationalism. Kenneth dies while standing on the roof of a local church and defying god to strike him down.

Although, this seems like an unlikely, even ironic, cause of death, and has parallels with the conclusion of *The Master Builder* by Henrik Ibsen, Kenneth's death is suitably heroic for an atheist. Fergus, by contrast takes the suitably unheroic option of suicide by flying his private aeroplane out to sea and escaping responsibility for his actions.

In a symbolic action, Prentice throws the last manifestation of Fergus, a paperweight, into 'the piling restless waves' of the sea.' This cathartic act symbolises a reconciliation with his dead father. Prentice informs the reader:

We continue in our children, and in our works and in the memories of others; we continue in our dust and ash. To want more was not just childish but cowardly, and somehow constipatory, too. (p. 484)

He continues:

Well the old man had been right and I had been wrong and I just hope that he'd known somehow that I would come to my senses. (p. 485)

This reconciliation with 'the Crow Road' (Death) is central to the novel and is depicted as central to Prentice's emotional development. The novel argues that rationalism is the only basis for maturity, growth and community. Indeed, as Prentice emphasises, to believe in and act upon any other set of beliefs is 'not just childish but cowardly' (p. 485). In this way the novel endorses, rational, communitarian, socialist, beliefs. But Banks is careful to avoid political dogma and the novel offers entertainment as much as it addresses a serious political agenda. Like other novels by Banks, *The Crow Road* can be read on either level and its author deftly allows both kinds of reading to co-exist.

In one obvious way *Complicity*, is different from either *The Bridge*, *Espedair Street* or *Walking On Glass*. The novel relies heavily on one established and recognisable fictional genre: the political thriller. *Complicity* has such

thriller features as political intrigue, the appearance of the security services, a threat to national security, a central character (Cameron Colley) who appears to be in mortal danger and an almost fetish-like description of Colley's professional protocols as a newspaper reporter:

Take the bleeper, mobile, Tosh, NiCads and slot in radio down to the 205...Stop along the road for papers; scan headlines, make sure that no late-breaking story displaced the Vanguard piece and that its intact (ninety-five per cent - a satisfyingly high score). (p. 29)

However Banks uses the thriller template as a frame for the most extensive and probing criticisms of British society. Practically, Banks makes most of the more obvious criticisms through the occupation of Colley, who describes himself to the reader, as a cynical newspaper reporter morally wearied by the political and moral corruption which he perceives all around him. Colley is also jealously proud of his own role as an investigative reporter, as a kind of media Robin Hood who uses his investigations to uncover political, corporate or financial corruption. In this sense, Colley represents the self image of the 'quality' British press: guardians of democracy, satisfying the democratic right to know of the ordinary man or women in the street. Banks sets up the thriller [G] narrative of *Complicity* in order to challenge this set of beliefs about the democratic credentials of the free press in western societies. In its second to final chapter the narrative tears down Colley's cynical outward appearance to reveal him as an idealist. By doing so, *Complicity* uses the thriller form to question the role of the 'free' press in democratic societies. To increase the topical potency of this examination Banks introduces a very recent actual historical event: the Gulf War.

In a moment of epiphany Cameron faces his memories of a newspaper assignment in Kuwait at the end of the Gulf War, what he describes as his one chance to be 'a genuine front-line journalist, a rootin-tutin-token God bijayzus gonzo war correspondent' (p. 290). But Cameron failed this challenge, and it is through this failure that *Complicity* weaves together its

most trenchant social and political criticisms. The title of the chapter in which Cameron reawakens his memories is entitled Basra Road; a name which is charged with symbolic significance. Basra Road is the main road north out of Kuwait City, the capital of Kuwait. This road was as Colley describes, the literal end for thousands of fleeing Iraqi troops at the end of the Gulf War. Colley indicates that the sight of the aftermath of such carnage destroyed his faith in the power of words. He was: 'reduced to a numb dumb realization of our unboundedly resourceful talent for bloody hatred and mad waste but stripped of the means to describe and present that knowledge' (p. 290).

Complicity poses the broader question of whether words and rational argument have reached their Basra Road, their end in the kind of 'new world order' which Colley describes to the reader. In this way the novel can be compared to *Espedair Street* or *The Bridge*, because in *Complicity* Banks uses the same narrative device technique: the personal predicaments and crises of a central character symbolise what is wrong with the societies in which they live. Through the act of telling or narrating his own problems Cameron, like Weir and Orr, are also criticising the societies which create their predicaments. *Complicity* uses this technique with a political force which is unique in Banks's career.

The novel is partially narrated by an assassin who systematically murders, or assaults, prominent public figures. Readers are faced with two questions: who the unnamed assassin is and his or her motives. Once Andy is revealed as the culprit, *Complicity* uses these two questions to ask whether the politically and ethically bankrupt 'new world order' should be challenged by violent or non-violent means. This moral dilemma is at the centre of the novel. Near the novel's conclusion, Banks uses a dialogue between Andy and Colley, to draw its reader's attention to the pros and cons of a cynical but ultimately humanist set of beliefs, versus nihilistic direct action, in a world which both agree is predicated upon 'global barbarism' (p. 302). *Complicity* draws the reader towards some radical conclusions.

By describing his past, the novel indicates that Andy is a product of the 'new world order' as well as of a peculiarly British political and ideological system. Andy has been the successful entrepreneur, he served his country in the Falklands conflict, he has been part of the military and economic system's objectives and has, in the past, conformed to the its ideals. Like Lennox in *The Bridge* accommodating these values have made him bitter and emotionally damaged. Unlike Lennox however, Andy converts this bitterness into murderous hatred.

Complicity seeks to persuade its reader that, precisely because of these circumstances, Andy's vengeance becomes morally ambiguous. In a very real sense, he is a product of the system which he attacks. As he plausibly informs Colley and the reader, in a society predicated upon a 'perversion of moral values...*nothing*, nothing I have done has been out of place or out of order or wrong' (p. 301, original italics).

Complicity, if not condoning such direct action, refrains from condemnation. The novel highlights, as well as draws upon, emotionally powerful resentments which are an underbelly of British society. As I pointed out earlier, *Walking On Glass* draws upon the subcultural recognition of its reader that 'Pakki' and 'cans' are racist and sexist, but nevertheless prevalent terms among some social circles. *Walking on Glass* parodies such racist and sexist currents among the working-class. By parody Banks signals that such political primitivism cannot, and should not, be seriously considered. In contrast *Complicity* draws upon its reader's subcultural knowledge in the same way, but refrains from humorously dismissing such popular resentments about the structure and priorities of contemporary British society.

The novel also actively and explicitly challenges the social, political and ethical values of its reader. One notable example of this tendency is the way in which *Complicity* treats the pejorative term terrorism. Colley begins his narration by drawing attention to the politically legitimised policy option called a nuclear deterrent residing in 'half a billion quid's worth,' 'of the biggest blackest slug in the world' (p. 11). Colley's narrative emphasises

this 'obscene and definitively, deliberately useless' element of calculated State Terrorism. By doing so the narrative unmask the euphemism 'deterrent' and it makes Andy's acts of terrorism seem minor when compared to the lengths that the State is willing to go to to maintain its balance of terror.

This sense of facing the reader with the unacceptable was, predictably, seized upon during the novel's critical reception. John Sutherland, reviewing *Complicity* for the *London Review Of Books*, argued that: 'What gives *Complicity* its sharp edges is less its contrived shocks than the way in which the novel constantly makes as if to flout the libel laws of 1993.' ²⁶ He goes on to emphasise how Andy's fictional victims have close affinities with factually unpopular or controversial public figures. Sutherland concludes that there are points in the novel 'where Banks seems to be on the verge of discarding the protective veils of fiction in order to fantasise class revenge on identified class enemies.'²⁷

Sutherland is correct to emphasise the 'faction' element of *Complicity*, but I would disagree with his interpretation of exactly why the novel has such 'sharp edges.' From the reader's perspective the most shocking elements of *Complicity* derive from the way in which it blurs the distinction between fiction and fact. The term, derive from, is crucial here. The novel draws its subversive energy from the way in which its author incorporates factual knowledge and processes such knowledge through fictional techniques. The resulting scenarios are what shock the reader; but this shock is greatly intensified by its reader's recognition that their fantasies have been complicit in creating these scenarios. This occurs in two stages.

Complicity heightens its reader's distaste for the corrupted products of the society which they inhabit by selecting morally obnoxious public figures as Andy's targets, for example, The Rt. Hon. Edwin Persimmon, whom Andy's narration signals has escaped legal retribution for unethical arms sales to Iran.

The headline of the first article reads - EX-MINISTER IN IRAN
ARMS DEAL ROW, and in smaller writing underneath it says, 'it
was my judgement that the interests of the West would be best

served if the Iran-Iraq War went on for as long as possible.'
(p. 58)

The narration emphasises the calculated immorality of such figures who are at the heart of the British 'democratic' system and it substantiates its case by drawing upon its reader's awareness of such scandals during the late 1980s and 1990s.

But Banks then takes the reader's hatred of such figures and displays one grimly logical, if horrific, way to deal with institutionalised and legalised immorality. The reader is both repulsed by the graphic retributions which Andy takes on these figures and thrilled by the fact that such vengeance has taken place. This conflict between the reader's horror and pleasure is central to *Complicity* and creates its disturbing edge. In this sense, Sutherland's argument that Banks 'fantasises straight class revenge on identifiable class enemies,' is inaccurate. Andy is simply an extension of the reader's own darker political fantasies; fantasies which Banks subversively manipulates within *Complicity*.

Complicity begins as a thriller and ends as something which resembles a political tract. Moving the generic goalposts [G] is typical of Banks's novels and *Complicity* extends the kind of political and social criticism which can be found in novels such as *The Bridge*. There is, however, a different tone about the novel because *Complicity* contains a tangible sense of anger about the direction of contemporary British society. It is also utterly bleak. The novel ends with its central character discovering that he has lung cancer, a tumour 'about the size of a tennis ball' (p. 313). As well as dashing the reader's hopes of any happy narrative resolution, this discovery has a metaphoric resonance. As Cameron sits snorting cocaine to ease the pain radiating from his tumour, the novel's last image is of a humanism which has been infected, in not eaten up, by nihilism :

You tap the other packet in your jacket, then shrug, take it and open it. You bought these last night too. What the fuck. Screw the world, bugger reality... You light a cigarette, shake your head as you look out over the grey-enthroned city and laugh. (p.313)

This metaphor of hopelessness stands in sharp contrast to the conclusion of *The Crow Road*, and from a broader perspective *Complicity* can be seen as a dystopic prediction about the future of a Western Civilisation and in particular, a British society, which in Andy's words, has 'chosen to put profits before people, money before morality, dividends before decency, fanaticism before fairness' (p. 301).

The novels of Iain Banks thrive on dualities: the serious and non-serious, literary and non-literary, popular and non-popular, the grotesque and the ironically understated. They refuse to consider any of these categories as final, definitive or authoritative. They also envisage the same kind of relationship with their reader: active, provisional and temporary, a consumer to be tricked, confounded and disturbed as well as pleased, thrilled and absorbed. *Complicity* and other novels by Banks exploit a central historic characteristic of the novel form: its unfinished and flexible nature, its energy, its 'novelness', [G] but Banks takes such characteristics and extends them into engagements with key cultural, social and political issues.

Complicity, *The Crow Road*, and *The Bridge* try to convey and explore what it is like to live in a culture which has a multiplicity of co-existing narrative forms: computer simulated worlds, the electronic media, popular music and the horror movie. Novels by Banks draw energy from this diversity, and by doing so they decentralise the authority of a traditionally privileged literary culture. They are not respectful of literary categories, indeed as I have shown, they satirise and try to debunk the divisions which are used to separate quality fiction from low-quality fiction.

In keeping with this emphasis, novels by Banks advertise their place in a culture dominated by rapid and voracious consumption of all manner of cultural forms and products, but like Daniel Weir, the main character of *Espedair Street*, they are resistant to, and critical of, the political, ideological and economic forces behind these symbols of capitalism. Creating a novel which escapes the demands of cultural, literary authority,

or as Weir recognises a form of class authority, is also intertwined with finding ways to envisage a British society free from the destructive demands of capitalism itself. This is the most unstable and fundamental duality of Banks's novels.

Endnotes

- 1 James Kelman, private letter, 17 June 1996.
- 2 'Grapevine' *The Observer*, 16 October 1994.
- 3 Andrew O'Hagan, 'The Scottish Write To Be Different', *The Guardian*, 13 October 1994, p. 22.
- 4 Simon Jenkins, 'An Expletive Of A Winner', *The Times*, 15 October, p. 20.
- 5 Kirby Martin, rev. of *A Disaffection*, *The New York Times Book Review*, 18 June 1989, p. 14.
- 6 Miller, p. 161.
- 7 Stevenson, p. 292.
- 8 Gramsci, p. 250.
- 9 *Some Recent Attacks*, p. 82.
- 10 Harvie, p. 99.
- 11 Adam Mars-Jones, rev. of *How Late It Was, How Late*, *The Times*, 20 April 1994.
- 12 *Some Recent Attacks*, p. 78.
- 13 Miller, p. 157.
- 14 Wallace, p. 217.
- 15 *The Burn*, p. 5.
- 16 Adam Mars-Jones, rev. of *How Late It Was, How Late*, *The Times*, 20 April 1994.
- 17 Craig, p. 110.
- 18 Craig, p. 110.
- 19 Ken Garner, 'Thereby Hangs a Tale', *The Listener*, 21 June 1991, p. 37.
- 20 *The Burn*, p. 178.
- 21 Waugh, p. 184.
- 22 Waugh, p. 79.
- 23 *The Burn*, p. 5.
- 24 Nairn, p. 127.
- 25 *Larousse Dictionary Of Writers*, ed. Rosemary Goring (Edinburgh: Larousse/Lim, 1994)
- 26 Sutherland, 'Binarisms'.
- 27 Sutherland, 'Binarisms'.

Chapter 3

Could Not Be Let In But There Was A Duty To Entertain Them: Kelman, Banks and The Politics Of Interpretation.

Introduction

Novels by Kelman and Banks raise several interconnected and fundamental issues about British literary culture which can be summed up by looking at a single scene from *Walking On Glass*. Part Four of the novel begins by describing a picnic held by Slater, Park and Ffitch. The narrative informs readers that the 1984 General Election is just a few days away, and describes 'a short, muscled ex-soldier' called Ed' who has joined the picnic:

Ed' had short hair and wore cut-off jeans as shorts and a green Army T-shirt. He sat on the grass slowly reading a Stephen King novel. (p. 147)

Ed', as the reader soon discovers, is working class and supports Mrs Thatcher; he intends to vote for her in the coming election. The upper-middle-class Slater attacks his intentions and accuses him of supporting policies which are detrimental to Ed's own class. Slater comments: 'My God! The stupidity of the English working-class never ceases to amaze me!' The middle-class Park, meanwhile, keeps silent about his own support for Mrs Thatcher, but is disturbed that Ed' obviously does not give a toss about his educated middle-class opinion.

With this scene *Walking On Glass* makes a powerful comment about the relationships between literature and commerce and between politics and culture, in contemporary Britain. It describes a society in which an absence of cultural democracy and an absence of political democracy are closely intertwined. Ed's reaction to Slater's political censure and Park's disquiet is to carry on reading his Stephen King novel. He ignores their opinions. His reaction is symbolic; it argues that the working class has turned to the

culture of the marketplace and political demagogue rather than the cultural authority of educated middle-class opinion symbolised by Park, or the political radicalism of any upper-class intelligentsia symbolically represented by Slater. But Banks avoids the over-simplified conclusion that the commercial aspects of contemporary literary culture are an anathema to literary merit. He does not, like Orwell in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, or Richard Hoggart in *The Uses Of Literacy*, ask readers to register distaste at the commercial aspects of popular culture - the trashy, dubious cultural credentials of popular literature.

The choice of a Stephen King novel is significant because it reveals why Banks does not take this option, one which has proven so popular among twentieth-century British writers. Stephen King is an American writer working primarily within the popular horror genre. King's novels stand symbolically for the kind of commercial and unashamedly populist literature which an elitist British literary cultural establishment has traditionally regarded as non-literature.

Thus, Part Four of *Walking On Glass* discloses both an accusation and an aim. The allegation by its author is that British literary culture, and British culture in general, are shot through with class divisions. Through Ed', Slater and Park, Banks argues that these class divisions correspond to hierarchies of taste; commercial lowbrow fiction; middlebrow 'aspiring' fiction and highbrow 'literary' fiction. Significantly, Banks directs the reader's attention to the political results of these relations of cultural power: the political demagogue, and a political system which Andy in *Complicity* summarises as 'tough shit and not-quite-so-tough shit every four years' (p. 299). In the same way that Banks draws his reader's attention to these relationships between political and cultural structures in contemporary Britain, his novels disclose a rejection of these hierarchies. I established this strategy in Chapter Two, but in this context it is worth emphasising again.

Novels by Banks reach towards a novel which straddles both popular and non-popular culture. That is, developing a novel which can engage with

serious literary, political and cultural issues but which appeals to a broad readership which spans literary and non-literary fiction. This strategy entails a fundamental political dimension. It aims for a radical democratisation of literary culture by combining popular appeal - that which kept Ed' reading his Stephen King novel - together with an appeal to readers who wish to read technically sophisticated 'literary' novels. Amid this Banks also shows perceptive analysis of British society and presents a socialist vision of its problems. Although there is never an overt political agenda presented to readers, novels by Iain Banks come close to a persuasive agenda: persuading its readers that the dominant priorities and hierarchical structure of British society, are morally repugnant.

Kelman has opted for a quite different approach to the same political goals. In his *Some Recent Attacks: Essays Cultural and Political*, he reveals why. In the context of an essay devoted to the politics of art subsidies, Kelman criticises the approach of some on the radical left. He pillories the patronising attitude among those on the hard left who denounce art as inherently elitist and who 'work on the same principle as the Band Of Hope or the Salvation Army' handing out tea and biscuits to their working-class audience. Kelman comments:

It never crosses the mind of the vanguard that people living in Castlemilk, Drumchapel, Easterhouse, Craigmillar or Muirhouse, or any other housing scheme in Britain, might prefer a play by Chekhov or a painting by Cezanne or a piece of music by Puccini to whatever else is being forced down their throat. ¹

Kelman shows a strong respect for playwrights, painters and composers whose plays, paintings and scores would normally be thought of as examples of high art. His attack on the view that high art is intrinsically elitist, essentially bourgeois, draws its sustenance from his conviction that the methods, artefacts and genres of high art have been used to cement dominant social and political structures - but that this does not mean that they can not be wrested away from these dominant, elitist forces and given back to ordinary men and women. Kelman, therefore, perceives art as a site of struggle in which culture and politics are inseparable, a view which also

allows him to dismiss the condescending view that ordinary working-class men and women are unable to appreciate a play by Chekhov or painting by Cezanne because appreciating high art is beyond their cultural competence - a criticism he makes of some among the political left. This discloses the core of his strategy to enlarge the democratic appeal of the contemporary literary novel by creating a new, more accessible literary novel, rather than aim for producing a separate genre of 'proletarian literature', a genre about which Orwell expressed pessimistic reservations.²

This chapter has two interconnected objectives. First, I set out how both novelists' political strategies have had a bearing on the critical reception which their novels have received. Kelman was awarded the 1994 Booker Prize for his novel *How Late It Was, How Late*. His success was, however, followed by a stormy critical debate and I show how Kelman's views about the British literary establishment, and his aim to produce a more accessible contemporary literary novel, are related to the tone and conduct of the Booker debate. Publication of *The Wasp Factory* was greeted with a mixed reaction among critics. Banks's subsequent novels have been given infrequent, or inaccurate, scrutiny by critics. I argue that this is due to their popular dimensions and Banks's commercial success as a writer.

The second and wider objective of this chapter is to clarify how critical judgments can appropriate, limit, define, reject or ignore novels by contemporary novelists. I intend to demonstrate that a Gramscian model of the critical establishment, together with attention to the concept of ideology, can help account for the institutional position of critics and that this understanding can, in its turn, help to illuminate the general critical reception given to novels by Banks and Kelman. I wish to show how an understanding of ideology and the institutional position of literary critics can help transform and greatly improve an analysis of the critical reception given to two contemporary novelists.

Researching this chapter was a fascinating exercise, not least because I found the 'Booker debate' to be a revealing insight into the politics of literary evaluation and taxonomy. I also used the insights that evolved in

order to develop research into the notion of ideology. It is a complex concept, and a more detailed examination is presented in; Appendix A, this is particularly relevant to the second half of this chapter.

Kelman and The 1994 Booker Prize.

Writing in 1919, Virginia Woolf proposed a new novel based on the 'everyday'. She asked readers to:

Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions - trivial, fantastic, evanescent or engraved with the sharpness of steel. from all sides they come, an incessant show of innumerable atoms; and as they fall they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old; the moment of importance came not here but there; so that, if a writer were a free man and not a slave, if he could write what he chose, not what he must, if he could base his work upon his own feeling and not upon convention, there would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style. ³

Woolf's proposal has interesting relations with the then still infant discipline of psychology. What is significant about her account, is its rejection of such commercial characteristics of fiction as love interest and comedy. Earlier she comments,

The writer seems constrained, not by his own free will but by some powerful and unscrupulous tyrant who has him in thrall, to provide a plot, to provide comedy, tragedy, love, interest and an air of improbability embalming the whole so impeccably. ⁴

Woolf is proposing a new type of non-commercial novel. In *Essays Cultural and Political*, as well as in other sources, Kelman comes very close to proposing the same. He has commented:

Ninety-nine percent of the literature in great Britain concerns

people who have never have to worry about money at all. We always seem to be watching or reading about emotional crises among folk who live in a world of great fortune both in matters of money or luck...Or else we are given straight genre fiction...The unifying feature of all fiction is the way it denies reality. this is structural - in other words, if reality had a part to play in genre fiction then it would stop being genre fiction. 5

Buried within Woolf's championing of a novel of the everyday is a rejection of the commercial basis of the novel. This is the mysterious unscrupulous tyrant which Woolf cannot come to terms with and thus cloaks in mystery. Her account seeks to open up a space for the novel which is outside the grasp of commerce. Kelman is more explicit and singles out genre as the commercial culprit behind the unrealistic state of contemporary British fiction. For Woolf, writing in 1919, the future was modernism, a movement which was to culminate in artforms and artistic practices which were anything but accessible, popular and everyday. Indeed as Carey has persuasively argued, what retrospectively became known as modernism was largely premised upon a rejection of populism in any form: art was defined as that which was inaccessible to the tastes of the mass-public.

Kelman's commitment to everyday literature draws upon Woolf's vision of a literature which resists the appropriation of the novel by the commercial demands of genre. He revises this potentially elitist formula however. Where Woolf tried to envisage an artistic practice outside commercial demands, Kelman has sought negotiation with commercial demands in the hope of clearing a literary space for a new 'everyday' novel. The most visible sign of this negotiation came when he won the Booker Prize in 1994.

Kelman attended the ceremony in the full gaze of the media and assembled, London-dominated literati. The Booker Prize-giving ceremony is in many senses, a spectacle. Waugh captured the professional and economic shifts behind the increasing prominence of the Prize in the 1980s:

As academics busied themselves with learning to pronounce and to apply the new vocabulary of theory and thence to expand and reorganise the traditional canon, the evaluation and cartographic

organisation of the contemporary literary scene was taken over by professional journalists and literary reviewers, or organised around success in literary competitions such as the Booker Prize which would guarantee fame, fortune, and consumer success. ⁶

Waugh's emphasis on the commercially dynamic dimensions of the contemporary British literary scene is accurate and it was in the increasingly, and unashamedly commercial, environment of the Booker Prize ceremony that Kelman proceeded to make an impassioned speech for Scottish cultural self-determination, as well as defending his novels from what he called 'the irrelevant' negative, or occasionally hostile reactions of critics to *How Late It Was, How Late*. In his acceptance speech he stressed his alignment as a writer with working-class Glaswegian language and culture, a culture which he implied, had been marginalised and ignored by a dominant English literary establishment. In his Booker acceptance speech, Kelman strenuously pitted his authority as a writer against what he saw as these forces of marginalisation, telling the audience: 'My culture and my language have a right to exist and no-one has the authority to dismiss that'. ⁷

This upset the Booker Prize management and attracted criticism from some members of the literati attending such as Salman Rushdie, who commented to *The Guardian* that *How Late it Was, How Late* 'was the wrong choice'. Mike Ellison, 1994 Booker Prize correspondent for *The Guardian* newspaper, commented on the day following the Booker Prize ceremony (October 12) that:

Kelman was not the choice of the man in the Bloomsbury bookshop at a book-signing hours before the Booker was presented.

He continues:

Booksellers and bookmakers were bound to be disappointed with the short list after the popular success of Roddy Doyle's *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* last year. ⁸

Kelman's plea was an attempt to negotiate with publishers and distributors of contemporary novels and to change the agenda of the Booker Prize ceremony. What was envisaged by its organisers - the Booker management - as a marketing opportunity, which kept fiction uppermost in the awareness of, potentially, millions of consumers was seen by Kelman as an opportunity for a discussion about the politics of writing, reading and publishing fiction.

After attacks by critics, Kelman was angry and his speech received a hearing which was either indifferent or hostile. 'Grapevine' an anonymous article in *The Observer* reported a Booker employee muttering 'Here we go again, rhubarb, rhubarb,' as Kelman spoke.⁹ In the following week *The Daily Telegraph* went so far as to claim that the whole controversial atmosphere was a ruse by publishers and booksellers to push up sales of Kelman's novel: in other words the controversy was engineered.¹⁰

This is not true. The critical reception of *How Late It Was, How Late* both before and after its Booker success was characterised by controversy. To argue that the controversy was contrived belittles the serious issues which Kelman himself had raised over years. Paradoxically, this dismissive attitude was typical of reactions within some quarters of the critical establishment; critics did not like the issues which *How Late It Was, How Late* and its author publicly raised. Dismissing the controversy was an obvious strategy by some within the critical establishment: it allowed them to keep a distance from such pertinent questions as the political repercussions of having a London-centered reviewing establishment.

The entire debate over *How Late It Was, How Late* and the 1994 Booker prize was thoroughly political, even if this paramount political dimension was deliberately dismissed by some critics. Kelman's attempt to develop an everyday novel which was both highly literary and non-elitist, is central to explaining his own interventions over the critical reception of *How Late It Was, How Late*. His attempt to clear a literary-political space for this new everyday genre is essential in explaining the tone and conduct of the various debates which were to revolve around his 1994 novel both before and after its Booker success. For this reason the events of 11 October

1994 need to be examined on a broader timescale.

A Disaffection had been shortlisted for the 1989 Booker Prize but failed to win. Kelman was absent from the Guildhall during the 1989 Booker Prize awards.¹¹ According to Todd, Kelman had prepared a non-acceptance speech and left his agent to speak on his behalf in the eventuality of success.¹² *A Disaffection* went on to collect the *James Tait Black Memorial Prize* in 1990. At least part of the reason for Kelman's unrealised protest in 1989 seems to have been his lukewarm attitude towards why critics had selected *A Disaffection*. This was evident in B.B.C 2's *Late Show* profile of Kelman as a writer. In the programme, Kelman attacked what he saw as the biased criteria behind the critical acclaim which *A Disaffection* generally attracted. He told the interviewer:

It was predictable, if there was going to be acclaim it was going to be for *A Disaffection*. The central character, Doyle, is recognisable to the critics who've all been through higher education.¹³

This is plausible. Critics tended to focus on Patrick Doyle - the disaffected fictional school teacher at the centre of the novel. Karl Miller went so far as to call Doyle a 'Glaswegian Hamlet' and invoke Shakesperian parallels. Critics managed to overlook the fact that Doyle was not given a sympathetic treatment in parts of *A Disaffection*. Under scrutiny, the enthusiastic critical reception which the novel received is also suspiciously disproportionate. Critics tended to analyse and focus upon *A Disaffection* far more than *The Busconductor Hines* or other earlier novels by Kelman where working-class characters who have not been through higher education are central to the narrative.

How Late It Was, How Late was published by Secker and Warburg at the end of March 1994. A first round of reviews were published at the start of April 1994. Among these, Adam Mars-Jones in *The Times Literary Supplement*, attacked Kelman on a range of issues.¹⁵ Mars-Jones accused Kelman of superimposing a political agenda upon a 'fantasy of a defiant wholeness' and argued that the result was a clashing, inaccessible,

'narrative of subtractions,' which was only saved by, 'the prestige of dialect from sounding like banality or Beckett.'¹⁶ He also criticised Kelman's use of interior monologue and claimed that it was a 'highly artificial way of representing the mind's activity as speech'.¹⁷

During May, Andrew O'Hagan, writing for the *London Review Of Books*, launched a full-scale attack on *How Late It Was, How Late* as well as other novels. O'Hagan sharply criticised Kelman on two broad fronts. Firstly, he argued that the novelist did not speak for the poor of Glasgow but for a particular type of Glaswegian man of a certain age and satirically named this 'Kelman-man'. In his article O'Hagan sketched out the relationship between Kelman and 'Kelman-man':

He mostly writes about a quite particular man of his own generation, someone who grows detached, gets disaffected, who might drink in the old way...¹⁸

O'Hagan goes on to contend that Kelman's novels are irrelevant in the context of what, he argues, are the real social problems affecting Glasgow's poor. Specifically, he cites the prevalence of drug abuse among Glasgow's poorest housing schemes; the growth of gangsterism; the growth of aids and concludes:

the Glasgow housing schemes, and those which spread out around Glasgow, are not really the places of his writing, though they're thought to be. ¹⁹

Secondly, he criticise Kelman's political approach. He attacks the 'polemical dullness, paranoia and badly written style,' of the non-fictional *Some recent Attacks: Essays Cultural and Political* and argues that Kelman's political agenda mars his fictional writing. To support his case, O'Hagan cites something which I noted in my earlier chapter on novels by Kelman: the way in which their narratives deliberately exclude readers access to the mental states of figures of authority. O'Hagan argues that this is a negative strategy:

Kelman would appear to believe that his enemies, who are naturally the enemies of his central characters, are too inhumane to be rendered as regular humans committing inhumane acts. 20

O'Hagan's review ends on a caustic note, and accuses Kelman of political hypocrisy. In explicit reference to Kelman's argument that contemporary literary fiction is dominated by the small coterie of the critical establishment, O'Hagan criticises him for accepting literary acclaim from the same sources, commenting:

Sometimes when you ponder the power of the marginalised artist in this down-treading kingdom of ours you have to laugh. 21

On Saturday October 8 - three days before the prize ceremony - *The Independent* published a pre-Booker interview with Kelman. In the interview the author stressed the relationship between language and cultural power and specifically, the relationship between linguistic and cultural suppression. Kelman commented:

When people talk about the so-called expletives they're not talking about the real issue, you know. The real issue is to do with suppression - the standard literary voice won't allow it. 22

This was the author's preemptive reaction to the oncoming and predictable controversy over his extensive use of expletives in *How Late It Was, How Late*. Kelman's argument is that controversy over expletives is a euphemism for the policing of language and literary forms, that it is not about the words themselves but about control. His analysis is accurate.

On Tuesday October 11, that year's Booker panel narrowed its choice to between *How Late It Was, How Late* and David Hollinghurst's novel *The Folding Star*. The final decision in favour of Kelman's novel, took over two hours and was distinguished by disagreement among the judges. Among the judges three individuals made a decisive contribution, both to the decision itself and the ensuing debate. These were, Rabbi Julia Neuberger, Michael Wood chief literary critic for *The Guardian*, who was chairman of the committee, and John Bayley formerly Thomas Wharton Professor of

English at St. Catherine's College Oxford.²³ Neuberger voted against *How Late It Was, How Late*. Indeed, almost immediately after the final voting had taken place she publicly expressed her opposition and told waiting journalists:

I'm really unhappy. Kelman is deeply inaccessible for a lot of people. I am implacably opposed to the book. I feel outmanoeuvred.²⁴

She added her opinion that the decision was 'a disgrace'. Paradoxically, by deciding to disassociate herself from the decision, she significantly raised the media profile of the 1994 Booker Prize. Neuberger's angry comments were followed by conciliatory public statements from Bayley. He attempted to play down the extent of disagreements within the Booker panel and blandly said:

We had an extremely complicated and difficult meeting and were very divided. It was finally a question of three votes to two.²⁵

Bayley's language can be seen as a diplomatic attempt to defuse the impression of conflict disclosed by Neuberger's public outburst. It failed as a public relations exercise on behalf of the Booker Prize, and her negative remarks made the front pages of most, if not all, editions of British national newspapers on 12 October. *The Times*, typically, carried the front page headline: 'Booker Prize Judge Calls Winning work "a disgrace'. In a tone saturated with indignation, Dalya Alberge, *The Times's* Arts correspondent, wrote:

In a decision described as 'a disgrace' by one of the judges, a novel whose text is littered with expletives on practically every page has won the 1994 Booker Prize for fiction.²⁶

Bayley's role was decisive. It was his casting vote as chairman of the Booker' committee which ensured the success of *How Late It Was, How Late*.²⁷

The controversy immediately following the evening of October 11 led into a

more sustained and far more widespread debate during the following days and weeks. On October 13, O'Hagan continued his attack upon Kelman, writing this time for *The Guardian*. He set the success of Kelman's novel in the context of new writing from Scotland and went on to grant limited praise. O' Hagan likened 'the best' of to this writing to Rab C. Nesbitt the popular television character:

The best of the new writing from Scotland has been a little like this. They have been able to describe features and places and situations which used not to appear in fiction. 28

What O' Hagan finds unpalatable, is the politicisation of this approach, epitomised for him by Kelman. He continued:

All the Scottish writers talking this way are signed to English publishers, they are all welcome in most good publishers and arts venues, the papers are all for them. 29

O' Hagan's argument here is generally over-simplified and unfair for reasons which I will outline later. His last point is simply untrue. The papers were hardly unanimous in their praise for *How Late It Was, How Late*. Simon Jenkins, chief literary critic for *The Times* branded Kelman 'an illiterate savage,' and haughtily commented that: 'The award of the Booker Prize to Mr Kelman is literary vandalism.'³⁰ The language of the novel was further attacked as, 'Glaswegian alcoholic with remarkably few borrowings.'³¹ *The Daily Express* demanded that the Booker Prize be closed down and cited the success of *How Late It Was, How Late* as prosecution evidence.³² *The Sunday Telegraph* rubbished the whole 1994 Booker Prize and suggested that its prime goal was to boost sales by encouraging crassly false controversy rather than reward genuine literary merit.³³ *The Times* also suggested that the whole debate was a ritualised euphemism of little importance, part of what it nicknamed the 'Booker Circus'.³⁴ Nor was negative criticism confined to the more conservative national newspapers. Richard Ingrams writing in *The Observer* attacked the whole proceedings of the 1994 Booker Prize, from the public disagreement among its judges through to what he alleged was the

'incomprehensible Dave Spart' speech made by Kelman.³⁵ During October and into November 1994, novels by Kelman as well as the author himself were the subject of a satirical campaign. Cartoonists among the conservative national press, (as well as from some papers which were not conservative) launched humorous attacks, usually employing a caricature of a drunken Scotsman venting expletives. Such 'humour' pandered to crude stereotypes of drunken Scotsman and implied linguistic barbarism among Scottish working-class people. The motifs of 'obscenity' 'vulgarity' and linguistic poverty stood side by side with a usually unspoken, but sometimes explicit, prejudice against the very idea of representing working-class - or what *The Times* described as 'lumpenproletariat'- life in contemporary literary fiction. Most of the negative or hostile criticism after October 11 had this as its underbelly, while it ostensibly attacked 'obscenity.' Kelman's opinion that the obscene language issue was actually about literary suppression and censorship, turned out to be percipient.

David Harrison, writing in *The Observer* on October 16, actually satirised the entire Booker debate. His article satirically proposes that the term 'Kelmanism' might be used instead of the word fuck, or any variant of fuck:

The Kelman word now appears brazenly on T shirts ...comics such as *Viz* are studded with 'Kelmanisms' and references to legitimacy.³⁶

Harrison's article subverts accusations of obscenity levelled at *How Late It Was, How Late* by members of the cultural establishment, and uses them to satirise the constipated conservatism prevalent within some parts of the British cultural establishment. By implication, Harrison supports Kelman's argument that much of the British reviewing establishment is elitist and out-of-touch with the culture that most people live within.

A similar position was adopted by James Wood at the end of October 1994. Wood cites 'the shocking peal of prejudice and snobbery' displayed by the critical establishment as his basis for speaking out in defence of Kelman.³⁷ Wood makes two interventions. Firstly, he defends and then explains his decision as a judge in the 1994 Booker committee for backing *How Late It*

Was, How Late. Secondly, Wood defends Kelman's novels in general from the charges of 'obscenity'. Wood does so by locating Kelman's writing and his approach as an author, within a tradition of 'decent socialism'. He argues that critics of *How Late It Was, How Late* and its author's use of language - implicitly Simon Jenkins - are 'lexical paupers' who display their literary ignorance by being unable to perceive that Kelman is working within an established literary-political tradition. Wood, therefore, unexpectedly mobilises literary tradition to defend Kelman.

Neither Commercial Nor Suitable: An Analysis Of The 1994 'Booker Debate'

Neuberger's judgement that the winner of the 1994 Booker Prize was 'inaccessible' proved to be an important starting point to the debate after October 11. As was noted in earlier, it was eagerly seized upon by waiting representatives of the press, though as a judgement of literary merit it is gnomic. Harrison focused on Neuberger's judgement and his account emphasises that expletives are unremarkable - and unremarked upon - features of popular culture. [G] He raises the question of how expletives could possibly be considered inaccessible for a highly literary and technically competent Booker readership, when and by contrast, the presumably far less literary readership of a popular adult magazine such as *Viz* could easily comprehend such words. As I suggested earlier, Harrison is being mischievous by drawing attention to the implication of Neuberger's judgement. The issue, he implies, is not that the kind of 'Booker' readership which Neuberger has in mind could not understand expletives but that they would be offended by seeing such words in print, and, furthermore, printed in a novel which received a Booker Prize.

Harrison implies that Neuberger's comment is a laughably euphemistic way of rationalising her own prejudices against language from popular culture. This proved to be an attractive explanation for other commentators. In a letter written to *The Guardian* and printed on 14 October 1994 one reader posed the question of how working-class Glaswegian language could ever be dubbed inaccessible for literate readers. This reader also accused her of

trying to rationalise her own prejudices and suggested 'Perhaps she just doesn't like the vernacular?'³⁸ I would go further.

Neuberger's comment demonstrated how ideology can deform language. She was unable to vocalise her prejudices against working-class language and culture because to do so would have made her prejudices explicit and revealed the ideological basis of her judgements. Nor was she able to abandon her ideological opposition to *How Late It Was, How Late* winning the important Booker Prize. The resulting compromise is the nonsensical euphemism, 'inaccessible'. As Harrison rightly implies, this collapses under scrutiny.

Neuberger's influential and highly publicized label does, however, say a good deal about the social and cultural basis of what she perceives as an ideal Booker readership. As such its ideological colourations can be analysed. Her comments have a relationship to important tensions which have shot through the Booker Prize since its establishment in 1980.³⁹ In 1984 the Labour M.P., Ted Rowlands, who sat on that year's panel of judges, expressed his desire to expand the Prize's appeal beyond the 'traditional' Booker readership who according to him read: 'English middle-class novels about middle-age hang ups, sex and writers'.⁴⁰

Rowlands describes the audience which Neuberger feared would be alienated and offended by *How Late It Was, How Late*. As Todd, points out, the Booker has been a site of conflict between those who wish to see British literary culture pursuing a progressive route and those who wish to to see a traditional or elitist character to British literary culture. In 1994 these ideological fractures opened into divisions between the liberal and conservative portions of the literary-cultural establishment. In 1994 John Bayley supported the progressive faction of the literary establishment, and his contribution was decisive given the split voting at that year's decision. Bayley's commitment to a wider remit for the Prize, both in the kind of fiction which was he thought literary enough to be considered, and the kind of audience which he thought the Booker should appeal to, was conveyed in comments he made about genre when he said:

In looking for good fiction I feel the Booker judges should make no distinction between different kinds of excellence in the genre. Personally I would be pleased to give the prize to a really good murder mystery or scientific fantasy or to a gripping tale about cooks or icons, astronauts or tennis players - whatever had real and rare talent in its own line and is not merely modish junk, seeking to show off. 41

Generic, commercial fiction, is not usually considered 'literary' enough for scrutiny by the Booker Panel. This is implied by Bayley's mild-mannered qualification, 'Personally I would'. Bayley clearly believes that the Booker Prize should disavow itself of any elitist connotations and broaden its appeal to the readerships of generic fiction, rather than just literary fiction. This approach has parallels with the strategy which novels by Banks recommend: a coming-to-terms with the commercial basis of all contemporary novels, irregardless of genre, and a democratization of literary culture by appealing simultaneously to popular and literary readerships.

But Bayley's carefully-considered and inoffensive comments after October 11 were also aimed at placating the furious conservative faction of the literary establishment. *The Times* printed what amounted to an apologia written by Bayley on October 12. An editorial description placed above his article heightened the sense in which Bayley was explaining some misdemeanour to readers: 'John Bayley, chairman of this year's Booker judges, explains their controversial decision to choose the Kafkaesque *How Late It Was, How Late*'. 42 In the article, and as if to placate offended readers, Bayley chose to emphasise his conservative credentials by emphasising his distrust of the fashionable. He was also careful to mention such icons of the conservative and traditionalist literary establishment as Jane Austen. The article ends with a suitably vague and de-politicized celebration of the novel generally as a form of literature. Few readers, or literary critics, could argue with such woolly notions as the novel being about, 'growing up and finding things out; loving; despairing; faith and the loss of faith; the beauty of the natural world, and the epic struggle against its natural forces'. 43 As with Neuberger, language once again was used in

attempting to cover over conflict and contradiction. This time, it was used to try and persuade readers of *The Times* either that disagreement between the liberal and conservative factions of the literary establishment over the 1994 Booker Prize did not exist, or that such disagreements were not substantive.

A key ideological element within the arguments of critics after October 11 was their use of emotionally-charged and highly symbolic language. Bayley's account is a good example of this phenomena. He uses noble prose to create an aura of wonder around the novel form and in this way hopes to head-off potential criticism from readers on a day when the editorial of the paper condemned Kelman's novel as, 'a rambling monologue of Glaswegian low life, narrated by the sort of lumpenproletarian Scottish drunk one might cross Sauchiehall street to avoid.'⁴⁴ This is the very antithesis of any high-minded discourse about the capability of the novel as a form of literature. *The Times*'s editorial makes a curt social judgement about the subject matter of *How Late It Was, How Late* and draws on the commonsensical 'knowledge' - or prejudices - of its readers to legitimise its editorial opinion. It assumes a shared social perspective between itself and readers: Kelman's novel is about 'those people', it continues, by dismissing the language of the non-respectable working-class as repetitive and inarticulate, commenting: 'Anyone who can read the coarser four-letter word has already read a fair part of the book.'⁴⁵

This account mobilises a whole set of interrelated ideologies in an attempt to rouse readers distaste at *How Late It Was, How Late*. An image is formed of the social 'type' which Kelman's novel represents - the alcohol-soaked, culturally and linguistically barbarous, undeserving poor of the Scottish working-class. The editorial also reinforces a practical attitude: a form of social practice. Kelman's novel is about the kind of people who are a carbuncle upon the social landscape, and whom sensible middle-class people avoid. Nationalism, class prejudice, cultural hierarchy, and a literary judgement all merge and intermingle.

Simon Jenkins, chief literary critic for *The Times*, continued the paper's

attack on the outcome of the 1994 Booker Prize. Jenkins invoked an image of invasion. According to his account, 'reading Mr Kelman's book was a similar experience,' to a chance encounter he had in a train compartment with a drunken, incontinent and abusive Glaswegian.⁴⁶ This symbolism is dragged out throughout the article and Jenkins even satirically visualises a fictional encounter between the Booker judges and the incontinent Glaswegian in the train compartment:

'Oh isn't he naughty' says the Professor Of Literature as Mr Kelman gobs on the floor. 'Oh but I think he's really sweet,' says another judge hugging his knees. 'Mightn't he be just a teeny weeny bit of a genius?' Pipes a third. (sic) ⁴⁷

After this satire, Jenkins goes on to pursue his real aim, which is to attack the liberal wing of the literary establishment. He attributes the 'literary vandalism' perpetrated at the Booker Prize to aspirations of political correctness among the judges and comments that: 'They greeted Mr Kelman as an inversion of the norm, a Jilly Cooper of the gutter, a Barbara Cartland of the the Gorbals.'⁴⁸ What incenses Jenkins is his belief that the liberal establishment have contrived to allow the Booker Prize to be penetrated by cultural and linguistic savagery and thereby desecrated English Literature. Jenkins constructs a scenario in which barbarism from the national and ideological periphery is threatening to destroy the hold of a hegemonic literary culture. According to Jenkins the whole system of English Literature is in danger of a descent into chaos and Philistinism.

Versions of these arguments can be found in other reactions to the 1994 Booker decision. The conservative faction of the literary establishment mounted a counter-attack against what it saw as the liberal ideologies behind the success of *How Late It Was, How Late*. Llewellyn-Smith, has aptly captured both the scale, as well as tone, of this counter-offensive. In a balanced and intelligent interview with Kelman held on Thursday October 13, she commented:

Kelman has woken up to a chorus of outrage. The previous evening his fifth novel *How Late It Was, How Late* won the

Booker Prize, but the tributes and glory, the comparisons with Kafka and Zola have been buried in carping and quibbling.⁴⁹

Nationalist ideologies formed an important portion of this barrage. Indeed one indication that conservative critics felt that substantive issues were at stake, can be detected by the way in which several critics cited the 1994 Booker Prize as an example of a broader national malaise, or claimed that it was a national embarrassment. At a later date, Geoffrey Wheatcroft combined a dismissive attack upon *How Late It Was, How Late* with the latter when he commented 'Our novelists are laughed at when the Booker Prize is given to a book consisting of the obscene ramblings of a Glaswegian drunk.'⁵⁰

Kelman's Booker success demonstrated that some critics perceive the Booker Prize as an international showroom for the best of English, not British or Commonwealth, Literature. Wheacroft's account, for example, tries to enlist its reader's sympathy for his nationalist case by stressing how embarrassing the Booker decision is for Britain as a nation, and how the success of Kelman's novel in the most important award for new fiction in English, demeans that award as well as Britain's standing in the eyes of the world.⁵¹ This approach was also taken by *The Daily Express* on October 12 when its editorial demanded that the Booker be closed down on account of that year's choice.⁵²

Much of the nationalist criticism presented after October 11 took it as granted that *How Late It Was, How Late* was unquestionably obscene, and then moved on to argue that it embarrassed Britain to select such a novel. A crude ideological strategy is applied here. The question is not if Kelman's novel is obscene, or what constitutes obscenity in literature, but rather what consequences can be deduced about the cultural state of Britain when a mark of institutional recognition is given to an obscene novel. The Tory M.P., George Walden, adopted this deductive approach in his article 'Doff Your Cap and Plead Englishness'.⁵³

Walden's thesis is that the English are suffering from a national malaise,

which involves extremes of deference or anti-deference before others. He sees the 1994 Booker Prize decision as a symptom of this national illness. *How Late It Was, How Late* is described as 'a dour puritanical novel with its single expletive.'⁵⁴ Kelman's novel is placed alongside, what Walden argues, is a catalogue of other cultural symptoms supporting his thesis: the 'queasy classlessness' of the B.B.C., Damien Hirst's pickled sheep, 'prolier-than-thou' accents, and 'the grim egalitarianism' of state Education.⁵⁵ Several things are interesting about Walden's account. Firstly, despite appearances, he does not condemn Kelman's novel on the grounds of obscenity alone. What Walden attacks is the 'dour' way in which this obscenity is captured and what he calls 'puritanical' tone of the novel. The reasons why Walden should dub the novel 'dour' and 'puritanical' are important, because they demonstrate his complete ignorance of the difficult and necessarily constrained social and material existence of real people struggling on low wages and state benefits, and as represented by characters like Sammy in *How Late It Was, How Late*. As I noted in Chapter Two, Kelman seeks to capture the everyday struggles of the economically and socially disenfranchised populace of contemporary urban Britain. By doing so, novels like *A Busconductor Hines* and *How Late It Was, How Late* constantly underline the destructive immorality of contemporary British society. To most M.P.s, who possess power, status, and a comfortable income, these renditions must seem distantly absurd and unrealistic. To a Conservative M.P. their political perspective must seem unacceptable on ideological grounds.

'Doff Your Cap and Plead Englishness' discloses some interesting relations between class and cultural production. The inclusion of *How Late It Was, How Late* in Walden's catalogue of cultural sickness betrays a longing for a society which is far more socially and culturally hierarchical. What angers Walden is that the rigid parameters between art and non-art, good taste and bad taste, are being blurred within the nation's cultural establishments, the Booker Prize, the Tate Gallery, the B.B.C. His emphasis on the 'grim egalitarianism' of State Education, indicates what he sees as the causes of this 'disease' - the cultural elite have relinquished control over the province of good taste and sunk to 'vapid condescension' of vulgar cultural products.

In response, Walden's account sets out an extremely conservative agenda. He envisages a time where a privileged elite re-establish control over good taste and good culture, and 'the masses' are content with whatever cultural scraps are thrown from the table of this charmed minority.

Walden's attack is on some imaginary liberal intelligentsia who have encouraged the spread of egalitarian ideas throughout State Education, who back the 'queasy classlessness' of B.B.C., and are behind the 'nervy endorsement' of the ill-deserved *How Late It Was, How Late*. This approach has parallels with O'Hagan's account, in which he argues that the critical establishment 'are all for' the token radicalism of authors like James Kelman.⁵⁶ Attacks on the 'liberal' intelligentsia are routed through the publicity granted to Kelman's novels and most particularly the publicity given to his political views. This extends to attacks on the Booker Prize itself, notably an article by Richard Ingrams when he recommended resignation to Martin Goff, its organiser. What negative criticism by Ingrams, Wheatcroft, Walden, O'Hagan, and Jenkins all have in common are the way they attack the liberal faction of the literary establishment for allowing the success of *How Late It Was, How Late* to take place at all. Even O'Hagan, who seems to support the aim of representing a Glaswegian working-class culture infected by drug abuse, gangsterism and H.I.V., attacks the support given by this liberal establishment to novels by Kelman.

A significant portion of the debate after October 11 was not actually concerned with *How Late It Was, How Late*. The novel and its author's success at the 1994 Booker Prize became the motif for a conservative backlash against the liberal faction of the literary-cultural establishment. It was also the case that literary critics' judgements tended to chime with the collective editorial judgements of the newspapers for which they worked. Jenkins's negative view of *How Late It Was, How Late* mirrors that of *The Times* editorial which I examined earlier, as well as those of Dalya Alberge, arts correspondent for the paper. The supposedly individual, professional, views of an 'expert' - the literary critic - are reflected within the institutional view of the paper's editorial and vice versa. This also held good for criticism which was negative in another sense. Criticising an individual and

criticising an ideology or an institution became inseparable in this acrimonious debate. Jenkins singles out the Booker judges for ridicule as well as liberal institutions. O'Hagan made personal attacks on Kelman as well as the more general notion of the liberal intelligentsia. Richard Ingrams attacked the 'farcical' nature of the whole Booker institution and attacked the position of its organiser, Martin Goff. Michael Wood, chief literary critic for *The Guardian* perceived a personal edge to comments made by Jenkins and responded in kind, by branding him a 'lexical pauper.' 57

It is also the case that the conservative faction of the literary establishment managed to outmanoeuvre the more liberal, progressive faction. As I said in Chapter Two, critics have inserted *How Late It Was, How Late*, *A Disaffection* and other novels into a bewildering array of literary traditions. My argument has consistently been that such pigeonholing deflects or fails to identify the political thrust of Kelman's novels. In light of the negative criticism which I have identified in this chapter this observation becomes more significant. The tone and arguments of much of the sympathetic criticism of *How Late It Was, How Late* can be explained in the light of the anti-political agenda set by the negative criticism which I have identified in this chapter. Like Bayley, those in defence of Kelman did so by apologia and by defensive reference to well-established authors and literary traditions. This can be seen as an indication that conservatives within the literary establishment had managed to set the agenda for discussion of Kelman's place within contemporary literature.

Wood's article 'In Defence Of Kelman' illustrates this argument perfectly. What was surprising about Wood's intervention was how it mobilised literary traditions and other defensive, conservative, constructs to defend Kelman's literary reputation. Wood argues that 'Kelman writes a kind of prison literature,' and continues to trace the literary precedents of this sub-genre 'in some of Celine, in Camus's *La Peste*, in Solzhenitsyn, in Breytenbach's *Memoirs Of An Albino Terrorist*.' In this 'prison literature' Wood argues there is 'a luxurious oppressiveness whereby the smallest things, like getting an extra gram of bread per day, or looking at timetables for trains out of the sealed city of Oran as Camus's narrator does, are

subjected to intense scrutiny.' He argues that this narrative technique exploits the 'Biblical inversion of being rich in poverty.' Wood then goes on to acknowledge several potential criticisms of *How Late It Was, How Late* and Kelman's work in general:

Yes, the new novel is too long, and not his very best ...Yes
Kelman is a limited artist, who, like Nabakov's ape tends to draw
again and again the bars of our cage

Wood concludes:

But Kelman most certainly deserved to win the Booker Prize. For
this artist writes movingly and with passionate attention to
language, and in his fiction his politics is the great decent
socialism of imaginative sympathy with the neglected and
previously unseen. 58

Wood saturates his defence of Kelman with pathos and the results are ridiculous. Kelman does not have a 'sympathy' with Sammy, Hines and other characters from his fiction. He strenuously aligns himself as writer with their political and social perceptions: this is integral to Kelman's narrative technique. There is solidarity and equality - not sympathy.

What 'In Defence Of Kelman' fails to raise, and skirts around, is the fundamental political issue of accessibility which saturates every novel written by Kelman. Producing a novel which reflects the everyday life of ordinary men and women and which is accessible to these ordinary men and women is a fundamental political as well as literary project. In fact the two dimensions are inseparable. Such a project entails far more than just creating English readers who are sympathetic with the Glaswegian poor. This 'charitable' attitude is attacked by Kelman when, as was shown at the beginning of this Chapter, he rebukes the patronising attitude of some on the hard Left towards what they see as the proletariat. Indeed, Jenkins seems to have a case when he argues that liberal critics have patronised the radical political agenda to which Kelman ascribes.⁵⁹ Kelman aims, as I have maintained throughout, to create a contemporary novel which is realistic and accessible in ways that, as he sees it, most other contemporary

fiction is not. Kelman may, or may not, be writing within a genre of 'prison literature': that is irrelevant. His hope, and energies as a writer, are devoted to allowing 'ordinary men and women' access to a literature with which they can identify. Attention to stylistic precedents of his writing or the supposed metaphysical symbolism of his narrative techniques can act, like the issue of obscenity, as smokescreens: ways of avoiding discussion of the real issues which the author and his novels raise.

It is clear from Wood's account, as well as others displaying the same tendencies such as Miller and Craig,⁶⁰ that conservative critics have managed to set the agenda for most critical discussion of Kelman's novels, in as much as they have managed to prevent serious discussion of the substantive political issue of access to a common literary culture. Wood's account bears the imprint of some ideological strategies which require more attention. For example, by drawing attention to the historical lineage of stylistic precedents for novels by Kelman, Wood erodes their contemporary political and social dimensions. Rather than being about the destruction of communities by unemployment and low pay, the increasing division of British society into the poverty-stricken and the increasingly affluent, the callousness of British society P.L.C., readers are asked to notice Kelman's use of free indirect discourse and his 'imaginative sympathy' with a suitably romantic and idealized Dickensian poor.

Roger Bromley has highlighted the subtle political effects of one ideological deployment of history. Pathos is also a central element of this model.⁶¹ According to Bromley, pathos works on the interpretation of scenes from the past, particularly scenes of working-class life and working-class poverty. He argues that a photograph taken during the early part of this century is not affecting because of its subject but because, 'it is swallowed up in the generalised pathos of times past.'⁶² Pathos aestheticises poverty, oppression and class and in doing so it breaks the political relationship which representations of poverty, oppression, and class from the past might have with the present. Hoggart has also conveyed his horror at the political consequences of this process and he argues that it has been particularly active since the late nineteen-seventies.⁶³

Pathos is part of a strategy of incorporation. Wood, Miller and Craig seek to incorporate James Kelman and his novels within the literary establishment. This is why pathos can be detected in all of their accounts, constantly leaking out in such phrases as 'imaginative sympathy'⁶⁴ and 'allegories of being.'⁶⁵ Indeed, this process of incorporation can be seen throughout the overall critical reception given to Kelman's novels, and it is closely related to the political and ideological parameters which conservative sections of the literary establishment have managed to set in the course of their leadership of the literary establishment as a whole. To succeed in the teeth of resistance from the conservative critical establishment, sympathetic critics are obliged to locate Kelman's novels within parameters which the whole critical establishment accepts. This is why Wood ridiculously argues that Kelman is working within the same tradition as Charles Dickens. Craig chooses Existentialist writers such as Camus and argues that the central characters are Existential 'questers after Being' rather than victims of an unfair social and economic order.⁶⁶ In doing so, Craig even manages to emasculate the political thrust of much writing within the Existentialist tradition. Macquarrie, in his assessment of the influence of Existentialism within literature, properly locates the appeal of Existentialism to twentieth-century writers within their broader political disaffection with the direction of technological and social development in this century.⁶⁷ In addition, writers like Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre had a militant, if idiosyncratic, commitment to Marxism as well as Existentialism.⁶⁸

Bradbury chooses Scottish and working-class canons as ways of politically domesticating Kelman's novels. He comments that: 'James Kelman has brought an experimental, stream-of-consciousness vernacular to working-class Scots life.'⁶⁹ This is logically incorrect as well as politically suspect. Kelman has not 'created' working-class Glaswegian vernacular as Bradbury implies. Rather, Kelman seeks to represent this language in ways which do not patronise or alienate potential readers who are from this culture. Bradbury's comment is significant because it discloses his belief that it is impossible for writers from a working-class background to represent their culture authentically in a novel. The further implication is that the working-class can be the subjects of novels written and read by 'other

people.' who possess their Scottish and working class canons of writing and since Bradbury manages to smuggle assumptions about the literary capacity of the working class into his account of Kelman's novels, it is not difficult to conclude that these 'other people' are the educated middle-class.

This could be an expression of pessimism at the possibility of a truly proletarian literature, such as that declared by Orwell.⁷⁰ What it certainly discloses is a willing disregard for Kelman's attempts to reach beyond the impasse which Orwell was intellectually honest enough to recognise. By placing *A Disaffection* in a Shakespearian tradition, Miller goes one step further in appealing to the ideologically acceptable icons of the literary-cultural establishment. In a revealing anecdote, his account places clear intellectual distance between the kind of people - critics; philologists; lovers of literature - who can appreciate 'authentic' Scottish dialect and those who actually use it. Miller tells of his childhood memories of an encounter with 'people of the road - among them, tinkers, pipers and folk singers' and whose oral culture he discerns in *A Disaffection* and other novels. He continues:

I remember these nomads myself from long ago in Scotland. I remember dark solemn and suspicious looks, as a travelling family was given tea in the back-garden of a house in the country. I peered at them round the house. They could not be let in but there was a duty to entertain them. ⁷¹

With this last phrase Miller has unwittingly summed up the entire ideological attitude of Wood, Bradbury, Craig and, of course his own account, of Kelman's novels. The fundamental political dimensions of Kelman's novels are not to be admitted, but for sympathetic critics, there is a duty to entertain them on an agenda which the rest of the critical establishment can accept. As with his own article, this frequently comes down to a folksy, patronising and inaccurate overview of Kelman's writing.

In this crucial way the literary-cultural establishment, and not just immediately after the 1994 Booker Prize ceremony, acted as what Antonio Gramsci describes as a hegemonic bloc.⁷² Despite friction between liberal

and conservative factions within the literary establishment, Kelman was grudgingly accepted as a recognised and accredited writer. But the price of this accommodation was that the political agenda of the author personally, and of which his novels were an extension, were not to be admitted. The practices of interpretation and evaluation have therefore acted as key hegemonic tools, practices which cemented this collective negotiation between the liberal and conservative wings of the British literary establishment.

Two critics, however, did make astute comments about *How Late It Was, How Late* and the debate following the 1994 Booker Prize. Julia Llewellyn Smith and Robert Winder questioned the motives behind the negative critical scrutiny given to *How Late It Was, How Late* when compared with the 1993 recipient of the Booker Prize - *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* by Roddy Doyle. Llewellyn Smith, argued that Kelman writes within a tradition of linguistic subversion. She suggests that Roddy Doyle is also in this category, commenting that Doyle is also a writer: 'whose characters also speak in an expletive-studded dialect but get away with it because they are jolly and Irish'.⁷³

This is perfectly correct. *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* also contains representations of young children swearing, something which breaks one of the strongest social taboos about language use.⁷⁴ Such comparisons serve to highlight the real basis behind the issue of bad language which emerged time and time again in critical reaction to the 1994 Booker Prize. Bad language stood as a euphemism for the political language of the literary-political strategy which Kelman made explicit at his acceptance speech of October 11, as well as in his non-fictional *Some Recent Attacks: Essays Cultural and Political*. It was the accuracy of his political criticisms of the 'Eng. Lit.' establishment, its elitism, and the biased criteria behind its selection of contemporary novels; which caused much of the literary establishment to class his political approach and that of his novel as 'obscene.' The issue of obscenity was a euphemism.

Andersson and Trudgill, in their study of 'bad language' note that

euphemisms indicate underlying taboos.⁷⁵ Taboo labels, as they make clear, do not exclude discussion of subjects altogether but seek, pragmatically, to control the discussion of issues which are problematic to a dominant social group. This operates by controlling the contexts of discussion. Hence, if bodily functions must be talked about, and in most contexts this is taboo, urine and faeces are words belonging to a legitimate medical discourse whereas piss and shit are not legitimate in most contexts.⁷⁶ Hostile, conservative critics faced a problem. Kelman was highly articulate as well as vociferous in his public interventions. His novels obviously had literary merit and had been extensively praised by a wide variety of critics prior to October 1994. This made it difficult for angry critics to dismiss his political claims by attacking his writing as non-literary. Yet his public and very political interventions consistently raised the taboo subject of access to literary culture and the social function of the literary-cultural establishment. Critics sought to control this taboo violation by deflecting attention on to the issue of obscenity. Ironically, much of the negative criticism disclosed a preference for a focus upon Kelman's use of fuck and other expletives, rather than a focus on the politics of the contemporary novel. The literary editor of *The Independent on Sunday* even went so far as to count the number of times the verb was used in *How Late It Was, How Late*.⁷⁷ In this case pedantry combines with small-mindedness.

About such negative criticism, Winder commented at the time that :

It is noticeable that Paddy Doyle, whose novel *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* is the biggest-selling Booker winner ever (300,000 copies in paperback) has not attracted the least opprobrium for his benign slang...it is not merely a coincidence that his impish and good-humoured variety of swearing goes down more easily than Kelman's harsher, less transigent and much more politicised version. ⁷⁸

At root, this could be taken as an allegation that the literary judgements of some critics after the 1994 Booker Prize reflected the commercial disappointment of publishers and booksellers at the choices of that year's

Booker committee. This approach can be developed by scrutiny of George Orwell's caustic review of *Best-Sellers* by George Stevens and Stanley Unwin. In his review Orwell uncovers the commercial relationship between advertising and reviewing. He comments that 'if a publisher doesn't advertise his books then they don't get reviewed' and that the publisher 'pays so much an inch for his advertisement-space, but the real advertisement appears to the left or right of it and is called a review.'⁷⁹

The Booker Prize is a giant advertisement for publishers and distributors of literary fiction. Many of them were unhappy that, as they saw it, the marketing opportunity of the year had been squandered upon a 'non-commercial' literary novel. In its coverage of the 1994 Booker Prize and the ensuing debate, *The Times* was particularly mischievous in this respect. It played on the commercial disappointment of booksellers and publishers and by doing so stoked up the perception that that year's Booker and *How Late It Was, How Late* were commercial failures.⁸⁰ There were also several other claims that the 1994 Booker Prize was a commercial flop. I have been unable to ascertain sales figures for *How Late It Was, How Late*, despite repeated requests to Secker and Warburg. Todd, however, draws attention to the relative scope of the term flop and estimates that *How Late It Was, How Late* (together with other less commercial Booker winners) has recouped publishers' costs in paperback at least.⁸¹ He also argues that perceptions of commercial success or failure can be distorted by the self-absorbed perspective of a London-based British literary establishment.⁸²

Nevertheless, the disappointment of publishers and distributors was palpable in the immediate period around October 11. One bookshop went so far as to claim that the entire 1994 Booker shortlist was 'Mogadon.'⁸³ Reversing Orwell's argument, it is likely that the commercial disappointment of publishers and booksellers was reflected within the critical establishment and encouraged critics to vent their scorn on *How Late It Was, How Late*.⁸⁴ This is what Winder strongly implies, and it also fits in with something which I noted earlier about the timing of the debate. After October 11 critics' first attacked Kelman's novel and then went on to criticise the Booker Prize itself. They attacked that year's judges for choosing such an 'unsuitable'

novel in the first place.⁸⁵ For the term 'unsuitable', and the accusation 'inaccessible', read uncommercial. The ideological interests of critics in upholding their own status as cultural gatekeepers and that of publishers and booksellers in ensuring a commercially successful Booker winner, coincided during the 1994 Booker debate. Neuberger and others provided an excuse on which to hang their disappointment. This also fits in perfectly with a theoretical model which can be drawn from Antonio Gramsci's observations about literary critics.

Of the bourgeois press Gramsci makes two fundamental points. Firstly he places the press within the 'ideological structure of a dominant class' and argues that the press is critical in 'maintaining, defending and developing' the theoretical or 'ideological front' of that dominant class bloc.⁸⁶ Here Gramsci assigns the press a central role in his account of how hegemony is created, reinforced and reproduced at an everyday level. Secondly, and related to the first point, Gramsci implicitly expands on the relationship between the press and the practices of hegemony by arguing that 'the press is the most dynamic part of this ideological structure, but not the only one. Everything which influences or is able to influence public opinion, directly or indirectly, belongs to it.'⁸⁷ The emphasis on persuasion is crucial and contains the strong implication that the ideological structure erected by a hegemonic class relies upon such persuasive practices to continue its operation and cement its legitimacy. Also, as his emphasis upon the dynamism of the press implies, Gramsci attributes to the press the most active moulding of opinion: it is a key 'material organisation' which battles along the 'ideological front' of hegemony.⁸⁸ The term 'ideological front' is a strong metaphor which conveys active struggle, a battle across a wide social front, in which the press constantly has to create and recreate an agenda and a public opinion which are conducive to the requirements of a hegemonic class.

Gramsci's extensive analysis of the schismatic struggles among Italy's literary intelligentsia throughout his *Prison Notebooks*, indicates that he was not wedded to a simplified application of this general structural model of the press. In a section of his *Notebooks* entitled 'Criteria Of Method' he

noted two basic characteristics of literary criticism. In the first he emphasises the productive impetus within cultural criticism specifically literary criticism, and comments that :

A consistently negative criticism, based on slashing evaluations and demonstrations of 'non - poetry' rather than 'poetry' would become tedious and revolting. The 'choice' would look like a man-hunt or else would be considered 'fortuitous' and therefore irrelevant. 89

Gramsci argues that critics overcome this potential problem by subsuming the work within a group of cultural works which are considered important, even if the individual novel, play or poem is not. Gramsci emphasises that the apparently individual opinion of a critic interlocks structurally with the collective exercise of critical opinion. 'In reality' he argues:

Every critic feels he belongs to an organisation of culture that functions as a unit. Whatever escapes one critic will be discovered by another. Even the proliferation of 'literary prizes' is nothing but a relatively well organised collective 'recommendation' (with varying degrees of fraud) by militant literary critics. 90

By 'militant' Gramsci means those critics who align themselves with the most active ideological elements of a national hegemony. In Gramsci's time the militant critics were attracted to the 'contentists': a group who wished to see the new mentality and revolutionary dynamism of an Italian fascist state expressed in a new literature.⁹¹ This historically specific dimension leads into the second basic point of Gramsci's analysis of literary criticism. He comments:

Regardless of the name they assume, restorations, especially those of the present epoch, are universally repressive ...Freedom and creative spontaneity disappear. Resentment, the spirit of revenge and a purblind stupidity dressed up in mellifluous jesuitical language remain. Everything becomes practical (in the worst sense), everything is propaganda.

controversy and (in a mean, narrow and often ignoble and revolting form) implicit negation.⁹²

Gramsci then points to an institutional tension within literary criticism. On the one hand, critics' are faced with a large number of newly-published novels, plays and poems to review, for this is their commercial function. As his comments about the productive aspect of literary criticism imply, at its most basic this means avoiding slashing, wholly negative reviews because this would revolt readers (and incur the wrath of publishers of the literature under review). Not only would a newspaper's readership disregard such wholly negative reviews, the newspaper itself might decide it could do without their services. But, on the other hand, the requirement to discriminate means that few of these newly published works can be recommended as great literature - otherwise critics' would predictably dub every new novel 'a masterpiece' and destroy their own status in the eyes of readers as experts recommending 'the best' among newly-published literature.

Hence, in order to avoid a potential conflict between the commercial and professional dimensions of their role, literary critics must identify significant - if not wholly positive - cultural dimensions to many of the publications which they review. Something important has to be said about the novel under review, if only to retain the reader's interest. This is what Gramsci means when he argues that: 'criticism must have a positive function, in the sense that it must point out a positive value in the work being studied' He highlights the significance of this exercise in discrimination: 'what appears to be a negligible problem' is actually something 'which from the viewpoint of the modern organisation of cultural life...is fundamental.'⁹³

Yet, as his comments on the reactionary official cultural criticism of a Fascist Italy amply demonstrate, literary criticism and its institutions are also understood by Gramsci as intermeshed within the broader institutional framework of hegemony. Accordingly he emphasises how this larger relationship can alter the practices of literary criticism - particularly critics' negotiation between their commercial and professional functions. Gramsci argues that the reactionary character of a particular historical moment can

negate or warp the more usual 'productive' dimension to interpretive practices within the institutions of literary and cultural criticism. Controversy, propaganda and negative criticism come to replace more subtle and positive forms of judgment about the cultural value of a literary work.

When his slightly gnomic comments about the importance of literary discrimination are viewed from this perspective their meaning becomes clearer. Gramsci maintains that despite their apparent independence, cultural and literary criticism are as much a part of the 'material organisation aimed at maintaining, defending and developing the theoretical or ideological front' of the dominant class, as any other section of the bourgeois press.⁹⁴ This lends his comments about the criteria behind critical acclaim, or attack, a sharp new significance. It emphasises that critics' judgments about the qualities or non-qualities of a newly-published poem, play or novel, will not usually bear the mark of their structural allegiance to the exercise of hegemony within the cultural realm, but that in reactionary historical moments this structural connection can override all other, including economic, considerations for literary critics when analysing the literary merit of particular novels, plays, or poems. Thus, argues Gramsci, in societies characterised by unequal socioeconomic relations, cultural criticism also distorts cultural selection and interpretation in terms favourable to the ruling bloc.

When taken together, Orwell's, Winder's and Gramsci's comments about literary reviewing and criticism disclose a new perspective on the 1994 Booker debate. The critical establishment, particularly its powerful conservative faction, was upset by Kelman's attempt to introduce a political agenda at the Booker Prize ceremony as well as the obvious political overtones of *How Late It Was, How Late*. They were doubly provoked by his claims on literature - something they regarded as their province of expertise as self-appointed 'cultural gatekeepers.' Critics, like Simon Jenkins of *The Times*, were encouraged to utter the most controversial, and almost rabid, comments, by the fact that publishers and booksellers were fairly certain that *How Late It Was, How Late* was going to be commercially disappointing. Critics felt certain that negative criticism was not going to

'spoil' a commercial success and offend the powerful commercial interests of publishers and booksellers. Conservative elements within the literary establishment abandoned the more usual practice of accommodating their commercial and critical functions. Their negative criticism discarded normal critical practice and was, instead, taken as an opportunity to reject Kelman's political agenda as well as attack a real, or imaginary, liberal grouping within the literary establishment. This hypothesis helps explain the double standards of critics when they failed to notice the colourful language of the commercially successful *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* as 'obscenity', yet berated *How Late It Was, How Late* over this very issue. In this way the intertwined commercial and political interests of the literary establishment were revealed over the 1994 Booker debate.

How Late It Was, How Late did not appeal to the conservative English literary readership which Neuberger and other critics' identified as their constituency, nor did it develop as a commercially successful Booker Prize winner. Literary critics could neither recommend it as a 'middle-class novel about middle-age hang ups, sex and writers',⁹⁵ nor a less literary but very profitable Booker novel. It was neither and many regarded it as the worst of both worlds being both political and uncommercial. Significantly, Llewellyn notes that even during the Guildhall ceremony the waiting members of the media, not usually known for their reticence, were: 'uncommonly wary, uncertain if this winner would play their back-slapping game'.⁹⁶ To Kelman's credit, he would not.

Rejecting The Popular - Critics and The Wasp Factory

What incensed the conservative literary establishment about the 1994 Booker Prize was that Kelman had been given a platform from which to espouse his views about literature. This observation indicates that a powerful conservative faction within the literary establishment would rather have ensured that Kelman and *How Late It Was, How Late* had been denied access to such an important endorsement as the Booker Prize and had, instead, been consigned to obscurity. This implies that that silence and a lack of critical recognition can function as hegemonic tools - strategies which help a dominant literary culture to marginalise the kind of issues which might prove disruptive. Gramsci's conceptualisation of literary prizes as the collective recommendation of hegemonic institutions also discloses that the criteria upon which critics do, or as significantly do not, recommend whole canons, literary authors, or individual novels will have a crucial relationship to the kind of cultural life which the cultural establishment wish to promote, or avoid.

In the following I demonstrate how the popular dimensions of Banks's novels have contributed to their exclusion from serious critical appraisal. Firstly, I do so by focusing on how literary critics have either ignored the popular and populist dimensions of novels by Iain Banks, or have appropriated their popular dimensions within the kind of recognised critical frameworks which conservative portions of the literary establishment can accept. Secondly, I will also set out and analyse the negative reaction to *The Wasp Factory* and demonstrate how negative reactions by conservative critics to this novel conveyed an impression that Banks was not to be recommended as a 'literary' author or *The Wasp Factory* as a novel possessing literary merit. Throughout, I contrast and compare the critical reception given to Kelman's novels in general, but particularly that given to *How Late It Was, How Late* after its Booker Prize success in 1994.

My argument is that the same processes of rejection and limited accommodation have taken place with regard to *The Wasp Factory* and Banks's novels in general, I also find specific reasons why this has taken place throughout Banks's career as a writer. I set out how *The Wasp*

Factory satirises a media debate over censorship which was taking place in the period around its publication. This is the radical edge to the novel which has been ignored by literary critics and for conservatives within the literary establishment this was enough for them to make sure that the novel was not recommended to readers but rather condemned on account of its sensationalist and popular representations. As with their focus on the 'offensive' language of *How Late It Was, How Late*, their focus upon the 'offensive' representations of *The Wasp Factory* acted as a euphemism for rejection of the popular.

As noted earlier in Chapter Two, Banks's novels cultivate a satirical and subversive iconoclasm. This is particularly forceful in his first publication, *The Wasp Factory*. The novel was at the forefront of a set of developments unfolding within the horror genre during the early 1980s and which extended the genre's realm into new areas of representation and exploration. Edwards argues that the novel deviates from the horror genre in the strict sense because it is not 'fuelled by any vision of a malign universe, or any sense of evil' and locates it within a margin of contemporary novels dealing with disturbing behaviour.⁹⁷ *The Wasp Factory*, like other novels by Banks, draws its energies from a wide menu of stylistic techniques only some of which can be categorised as recognisably affiliated to the horror genre. Nevertheless, horror is central to the novel. This can be illustrated by looking at one of the grisly descriptions which pepper the novel and elicit revulsion from readers. In this example the central character, Frank, describes a dog which has been mutilated by his psychotic brother, Eric:

The dog lay on the stream leading out of the marsh. It was still alive, but most of its black coat was gone and the skin underneath was livid and seeping...It could only see with one unburned eye as it raised its shaking head out of the water. In the little pool around it, floated bits of clotted half-burned fur. (p.153)

This description aptly captures the subversive edge between horror and laughter which is central to the novel, because as readers we get the

impression that Frank (or Banks) purposely chooses to make us squirm with exaggerated, overblown horror scenes: scenes which are so extreme and stylised that we cannot take them seriously. Frank himself conveys his disgust at Eric's handiwork, but this is also ironic given that *The Wasp Factory's* narrative is centred around violent and sometimes horrific descriptions of how he tortures animals, murders cousins who offend him, and generally behaves in ridiculously deviant ways, such as producing home-made explosives. In short, categorising Eric, rather than Frank, as psychotic is likely to strike the reader as laughable given Frank's highly eccentric, deviant and sadistic behaviour throughout the novel. Indeed, Frank stands as a laughably extreme version of mischievous childhood and is part of a satire on adult perceptions of childhood. On children's literature, Hunt, notes the influence of utopian adult perspective upon the genre, leading to children frequently being represented as extensions of adult fantasies.⁹⁸ Of children's literature as a genre he comments: 'Perhaps more than other texts they reflect society as it wishes to be seen and as it unconsciously reveals itself to be.'⁹⁹

Banks can be seen to satirising such utopian adult perceptions, particularly the belief that children can be 'little horrors' as well as that kind of British literature which describes childhood transgressions which are socially or morally acceptable to its adult audience. Frank is a monstrous extension of the kind of childhood deviance captured in the *Just William* series, the cartoon character 'Dennis The Menace', or films such as *The Bells of St Trinian's*. Furthermore, his warped boy-scout mentality is a satirical magnification of the practical, physical knowledge favoured within a firmly middle-class tradition stretching back to the nineteenth-century. This tradition is manifested today in B.B.C. television programmes such as 'Blue Peter'. The practice of 'making do' and creating 'useful' objects out of household rubbish is satirised in descriptions of Frank's home-made weapons. Out of discarded detergent bottles he creates flamethrowers; with his catapult he terrorises the local animal population. The male bias of the 'boy's-own' tradition is also mocked by Frank's final discovery that he is actually female. And an emphasis on moral framework (expressed as 'English fairness') is also satirically inverted: Frank is completely

unrepentant at his ingeniously carried-out and premeditated cruelty to animals. Frank does things to animals and humans alike which are patently unfair.

Banks exploits such situations to test the limits of readers' humour, as well as highlight the relationship between fictional and factual narratives. These tendencies are captured when Frank describes his practice of catapulting live animals across the island:

For six months I was the best customer the Porteneil Pet Shop had, going in every Saturday to get a couple of beasts, and about every month buying a tube of badminton shuttlecocks from the toy shop as well. I doubt anybody ever put the two together, apart from me. (p.46)

At this, and other points, the description tests readers' predictable moral censure by inserting a humorous context: Banks dares us to laugh.

The Wasp Factory is characterised by such subversive exploitations. Readers are repelled as well as fascinated by Frank's idiosyncratic perceptions as he mentally interprets life both on and outside the small island where the novel is set, a focus on deviancy which is intensified by Banks through exclusive use of first-person narrative throughout his novel. Banks also goes out of his way to describe Frank's 'family' as socially marginal. The Cauldhames, as Frank is fully aware, are marginalised by any standards. The physical isolation of the small island, and which is one of their last manifestations of the family's aristocratic past, stands as a symbol for their eccentric marginal relationship to British society and this focus on deviancy has broader connections which are satirically manipulated throughout *The Wasp Factory*.

Edwards's argument that the novel is outside the horror genre because it fails to capture any wider sense of malign presence is not strictly correct. In terms of its plot, *The Wasp Factory* is motivated by an escape from a psychiatric institution. The novel begins with a glimpse of Frank's belief in the intuitive capability of the Wasp Factory itself, the bizarre magical device

which he has constructed. He begins, 'I had been making the rounds of the Sacrifice Poles the day we heard my brother had escaped. I already knew something was going to happen; the Factory told me' (p. 7).

This 'something', readers quickly learn, is the escape of Frank's deranged brother, Eric, from a mental institution and his deranged, if not totally malign, presence broods over the narrative. His deviancy, unlike Frank's, is institutionalised, a factor which allows Banks to draw readers' attention to the socially-constructed and relative dimension of what is deemed unacceptable behaviour. Frank, unlike Eric, has actually murdered other children: Eric has merely frightened them. Yet it is Eric, not Frank, who has been incarcerated for the safety of society. Frank's analysis of why and how his brother became insane is important to the novel as a whole.

Frank tells readers that Eric used to work as a male nurse at a hospital in London, and that he discovered a dead baby while working on a paediatric ward. According to Frank, it was a vision of corruption which eventually sent him insane:

What Eric saw when he lifted that plate up, what he saw with all the weight of the human suffering above, with all that mighty spread of closed-in, heat struck, darkened city, all around, what he saw with his own skull splitting, was a slowly writhing nest of fat maggots swimming in their combined digestive juices as they consumed the brain of the child. (p. 142)

This is a grisly description which seems calculated to incite disgust and shock among readers. It also discloses a sense of satirical magnification. By combining a dead baby with an excessive 'schlock-horror' description of maggoty decay, the narrative threatens to undermine its own credibility and make readers suspect that Banks is making fun of their horror. Experimenting with reader horror to subversive effect has important relations with a broader shift within the horror genre during the early 1980s. Nicholson notes that pushing reader or audience revulsion into new realms was the identifying characteristic of this new movement within horror.¹⁰⁰ Representing deviant or corrupted sexuality was central to the way in which

this new movement explored readers' or audiences' revulsion and unease, a characteristic which is exemplified by the film *The Exorcist*, and which was among the first wave of an expansive shift within the horror genre. Nicholson broadly locates *The Wasp Factory* within this development and his analysis is useful.¹⁰¹

Among his many oddities, Frank, as readers discover by the end of the novel in a bizarre denouement, is actually a female. His father has been dosing his food with male hormones in order to reject Frank's - or rather Francine's - sexuality because he is a misogynist. Francine has therefore been the victim of a sexual experiment. Her sexuality has been exploited for parental emotional gratification. As Frank's description of Eric's discovery demonstrates, the novel also draws on a cinematic format for its visual descriptions of horrific events. This visual quality can be found throughout novels by Banks, but it is particularly prominent within *The Wasp Factory*. Nairn notes that the novel is filled with magnifications in which, for example, hunting rabbits is stretched to epic, and highly dramatic, proportions.¹⁰² An emphasis on stylistic and dramatic magnification, draws sustenance from techniques found within popular horror films of the late 1970s and early 1980s, where seemingly trivial events are revealed to the audience as significant manifestations of a malign and unsettling universe. Similarly, *The Wasp Factory's* satire upon children's literature works by magnifying trends already present within that genre. In an interview Ross, asked Banks about the 'detailed graphic quality' of important scenes from his novels. He answered:

I think fairly visually. Again, perhaps that's got something to do with the fact that we had a television in the house before I was actually born, which was quite unusual back in Scotland in 1954. ¹⁰³

This bears out my argument about the use of cinematic and televisual techniques in *The Wasp Factory*, and also sheds light on the formative non-literary influences on Banks's narrative techniques which can be detected throughout all his novels. As I argued in Chapter Two, novels by Banks are explicit in their allegiance to a wide range of popular narrative genres which cut across the boundary between literary and non-literary forms.

Complicity, for example, both relies upon as well as extends the thriller, a genre which is practised by novelists such as David Cornwell (John le Carre), but which also has a substantial cinematic tradition.

Probing and extending generic as well as other boundaries is at the core of *The Wasp Factory*. The novel is a mechanism for exploiting reader revulsion and by doing so it intervenes in a number of political and aesthetic debates. Kelman has been vociferous in his intervention over the issue of language and his novels need to be seen as a political intervention over the issue of access to literature and literary culture. *The Wasp Factory* is no less political in its intervention over the issue of what can be represented in the public domain. It mischievously challenges its reader's ethical stance by introducing the kind of issues which are most likely to offend British readers such as childhood murder, childhood sexuality, cruelty to animals. By doing so it intervenes within aesthetic and moral debates which consistently cropped up during the 1980s in Britain. These continue. Indeed, as I write this on 10 November 1996, Virginia Bottomley, the current Conservative Heritage Secretary, has appeared on the B.B.C.'s television news and called for new strict guidelines on, 'violence, bad language and sex.' The relevance of *The Wasp Factory* to these debates over censorship and about the moral 'state' of British society, can be highlighted by focusing on its date of publication. It was published in 1984, a year which saw a substantial moral panic over the issue of what became colloquially known as 'video nasties' and which resulted in the Video Recordings Bill becoming law at the end of that year.¹⁰⁴ Janovitch, notes how the term 'video nasty' connected corrupted sexuality and horror, two elements which are central to *The Wasp Factory*.¹⁰⁵ Reactions to these two dimensions were also present in the critical reception given to the novel.

Reviewing for the *Times Literary Supplement*, Craig berated the novel for its 'offensive' representations. Predictably, she focused on scenes where Frank is cruel to animals, commenting, 'in *The Wasp Factory* we have a literary equivalent of the nastiest brand of juvenile delinquency: inflicting outrages on animals.'¹⁰⁶ Gimson writing in February - the month when the novel was published - attacked Macmillan, its publishers. He commented:

'as a piece of writing *The Wasp Factory* soars to the level of mediocrity which may explain why Macmillan are becoming excited about it: most of the first novels which publishers are sent are so utterly unfit to be published'.¹⁰⁷

Gimson goes on to attack the 'crassly explicit' language of the novel and its 'obscene' plot.¹⁰⁸ Nairn, notes that very few English reviewers managed to comprehend the dark satire of the novel.¹⁰⁹ This has been borne out by my research. When I contacted the author he was both surprised as well as appreciative that I had picked up the persistent satirical edge throughout his novels. Yet the black but very effective satire of *The Wasp Factory* is even more obvious than that of *The Bridge*, or *Walking On Glass*. Nairn attributes a general critical blindness to this black humour through an emphasis on national differences. His argument is that novels by Banks draws upon a Scots-Irish tradition which was incomprehensible to English critics.¹¹⁰ This argument is unconvincing, a tradition of (largely oral) black humour also exists in the North of England. Nairn himself points out, in contradiction, that novels by Banks escape any classification as specifically Scottish in their literary borrowings.¹¹¹ In addition, there is an issue connected with critical evaluation. Literary critics might not find this black humour funny but the vast majority failed to even recognise any satirical presence whatsoever within *The Wasp Factory*. *The Cambridge Guide To Literature in English*, typically, describes the novel as: 'A gruesome Gothic fantasy about a maladjusted adolescent who visits unspeakable horrors on his young relatives and the surrounding wildlife'. It adds 'it is distinguished by its tactile descriptive prose'.¹¹² Thus, *The Guide*, along with most other critical accounts of *The Wasp Factory*, failed to perceive anything which might conceivably be recognised as humorous in the novel.

This has important parallels with the way in which critics marginalised Kelman's political agenda. As I noted earlier in this chapter, one of the ways in which conservative literary critics dealt with this unwelcome potential debate was by a strategy of deflection. Their attention, and that of their readers, either fell upon the stylistic precedents of Kelman's novels and therefore marginalised their fundamental political dimensions, or

alternatively, they rejected his novel's political credentials outright and swiftly sought to switch attention on to bad language, why the liberal intelligentsia had allowed such a patently terrible writer to have a platform in the first place, or how Booker success for *How Late It Was, How Late* was embarrassing for Britain in the eyes of foreigners. All these variations have a common root. Critics hoped that by ignoring or brushing aside Kelman's political agenda they might also avoid a debate about the political dimensions of literary evaluation and the social function of literature. This analysis also illuminates the critical reception given to *The Wasp Factory*.

Many critics failed to note humour in the novel because to share a joke implies a common way of perceiving social and cultural life. In this case it seems that Banks's satirical perspective proved to be either incomprehensible or alien, so far as most critics were concerned. This is suspicious given that *The Wasp Factory* satirises the whole debate over artistic censorship, a debate fuelled by the cries of conservative cultural observers.¹¹³ In addition, Frank himself is a parody of the kind of dysfunctional youth which the whole 'video nasties' debate and eventual act revolved around. He is the epitome of the demented, ethically corrupted, immoral youth which right-wing media campaigns throughout the 1980s created as a political totem. Banks, subversively, has Frank describe how he knows he is perceived as a monster by the townsfolk of Porteneil, the little town near the island where he lives:

they would run from me, or shout rude things from a distance, so I kept a low profile and restricted my brief visits to the town to a taciturn minimum, I get the odd funny looks to this day, from children, youths and adults, and I know some mothers tell their children to behave or 'Frank'll get you,'... (p.52)

The last phrase, 'Frank'll get you', echoes the popular *Nightmare On Elm Street* series of horror films in which the central character, a ridiculous figure with enormous fingernails, a trilby hat, and red striped jumper, invades the dreams of children and corrupts their souls. These images from within popular culture, leaked into the occasionally hysterical debates over artistic censorship which periodically erupted throughout the 1980s. On 30

June 1983, *The Daily Mail* echoed the image of childhood corruption and mental rape at the centre of *Nightmare On Elm Street* when it attacked video nasties. Using sexual imagery it argued that a 'rape of our children's minds' was being conducted by 'these soul-soilers that deaden decency and encourage depravity.'¹¹⁴ Banks's first novel has a powerful didactic relationship to these persistent currents within public discourse.

The conclusion of *The Wasp Factory* attacks the motives behind arguments about the need to control and police the public domain. Readers learn, through Frank's narrative, that he is a victim of adult control. His father has been guilty of imposing a demonstrably obscene as well as destructive experiment on his daughter's childhood. When seen in the light of the debates over control of video nasties, the conclusion of *The Wasp Factory* offers its readers a serious political point. It argues that such debates are about control of subordinate or marginal social groups, not about their protection.

Predictably, and in line with the critical reception which novels by Kelman received, most critics persistently ignored the wider political agenda of *The Wasp Factory*. Reviewing for *Punch*, Renolds, for example, commented that 'it is not an indictment of society' but instead likened the novel to 'a toy, a game.'¹¹⁵ Renolds also praised Banks for his creation of a 'minor masterpiece' and the unsettling moral perspective of *The Wasp Factory*, a novel which he aptly characterised as 'red and raw, bleeding and still even quivering'.¹¹⁶ In her overview of critical reaction to the novel, Carlisle notes that critics themselves were unsettled by the novel. She comments:

Much controversy surrounds the question of the author's intent in composing such a grizzly and fantastic tale; critics have attributed Banks's motivation to several varied forces, including the desire to expose the dark side of humanity, to experiment in the avant-garde, or simply to shock and revolt readers.¹¹⁷

One way in which sympathetic British critics bypassed their inability or unwillingness to see the wider political dimensions to the novel and its relationship with the whole debate over artistic censorship, was to turn the

spotlight upon the stylistic qualities and precedents for Banks's writing. Wade, typically, argued that *The Wasp Factory* was 'a first novel of unusual promise' but focused upon what she perceived as its unrealistic plot and argued that it tested reader 'incredulity to breaking point.'¹¹⁸ Without recognising that the novel draws upon the popular horror genre and debates about censorship, it is not surprising that such crude criticisms arise. Furthermore, it is silly of Wade to imply that testing reader incredulity is negative. *Ulysses*, by Joyce, stretches its reader's incredulity, so too does *Don Quixote* by Cervantes. *The Tempest* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* require a great deal of imagination from their audiences or readers. It could be argued that a key element of literature and a sign of literary merit, is the extent to which a novel, play or poem stretches its reader's or audience's imagination, deliciously testing their belief in the narrative unfolding before them on the stage or page. Wade's argument is actually a euphemism for a criticism which is frequently levelled at the horror genre and other narrative forms in popular culture. The argument is that popular culture is excessive and vulgar, whereas by contrast, 'good culture' is realistic and tasteful. In effect, Wade is criticising *The Wasp Factory* for its reliance on popular narrative forms.

Nicholson argues that:

Horror has a special relationship with its audience. Unlike science fiction which rarely acknowledges feelings, let alone sex, horror relies on emotions. Horror is an emotion and it must arouse a reaction. While science fiction uses intellect as a tool, horror engulfs the reader. 119

Nicholson's comparison between the intellect of science fiction and the pure emotion of the horror genre is questionable. Nevertheless, he rightly draws attention to the irrational, emotional, roots of horror and the kind of emotional reactions which the genre can generate. From this perspective, to criticise the irrational unfeasibility of *The Wasp Factory's* plot can be seen as a direct result of a failure by Wade and other critics to interpret the novel within the context of the horror genre. Without accounting for this relationship, such criticism simply misses the point, which is that the novel draws upon the irrational behaviour of the Caulhames to entertain its

readers. Wade's arguments, therefore, seek to deny the generic-narrative dimensions which have assured the novel's commercial success and its popularity with readers.

Several critics went one step further and attacked the novel on grounds of moral obscenity. Gimson¹²⁰ and Craig¹²¹ both pursued this approach. The pretexts under which they attacked the novel for obscenity are significant when analysed in the context of reactions by other critics. Both connect the commercial considerations of its publishers, Macmillan, with what they saw as the offensive representations of the novel. This has two connected implications. Firstly the novel is deemed to be outside 'literature' owing to its crassly commercial dimension and then used as the basis for an argument to the effect that *The Wasp Factory* represents cruelty to animals and other 'obscenely' bad behaviour merely as a sensationalist, commercial ploy. Ignoring the wider political context upon which the novel lays claim - the entire debate about censorship of the media - means that they can attempt to banish *The Wasp Factory* to the realm of tasteless, commercial, generic fiction. This is an unoriginal and jaded argument about the low literary quality of generic fiction. It is also an obvious use of critical judgment to marginalise the novel. What Gimson and Craig are asserting is their role as the cultural gatekeepers of the literary intelligentsia and their power to police the interpretation and classification of newly published novels - keeping literature free from the contaminating influences of a morally degenerate popular culture.

Rachael Bowlby has analysed the debates over two 'controversial' novels of the 1960s, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* by D.H. Lawrence; and *Lolita* by Vladimir Nabokov.¹²² She argues that the moral and aesthetic debates around both novels were actually about an extreme disquiet over the potential cultural levelling which mass consumption could bring. Bowlby notes that the controversies over both novels, particularly in the trial of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in 1960 for pornography, reveal a conservative project to connect pornography and consumption and reaffirm a conservative hegemony over 'great literature and healthy relationships.'¹²³ It can be seen here that the power to control definition, what counts as literature and

what is, for example, deemed pornographic trash, is a mechanism essential to maintaining the kind of social-cultural hierarchies which novels by Banks ridicule, but which are essential for the literary-cultural establishment.

Bowlby's analysis is useful because she carefully traces the connection between ideological acts of critical judgment and the wider historical context of a British post-war society premised on ever-increasing consumption. She argues that persistent attempts by literary traditionalists to isolate a zone of 'great Literature' were a reaction to an increasingly commodified and commercialised culture, processes which made it increasingly difficult for any intellectual elite to control the framework within which culture was consumed.¹²⁴ This is a theoretical model which I will return to in my next chapter. It is worth noting that *Espedair Street* honestly seeks to grapple with the issue of how any kind of cultural quality, indeed how any kind of authentic culture, can exist at all in these circumstances.

Earlier in this Chapter I identified that several conservative literary critics used the Booker success of *How Late It Was, How Late* as an excuse for an attack on the liberal literary establishment. What annoyed these traditionalists was that Kelman had been given a platform from which to espouse his political views on literary culture in contemporary Britain. They blamed the liberal establishment for allowing this disruptive episode to take place and attempted to police the entire critical establishment.

Both Craig and Gimson also adopt this approach but rather than blaming liberal elements within the literary-cultural establishment they blame Macmillan for allowing publication of *The Wasp Factory*. This also, conveniently, fits in with their emphasis on the commercial basis for the 'obscene' representations of the novel. In Craig's account the blame is implicit. By focusing on Frank's cruelty to animals, she conveniently categorised the whole novel as the 'literary equivalent of the nastiest brand of juvenile delinquency'. The phrase 'literary equivalent' is significant: it implies that the novel should be compared with video nasties, and these were officially categorised as a banned category of cultural goods under the terms of the 1984 Obscene Video Act. Consigning *The Wasp Factory* to

the video nasty category implies that it should never have entered the public domain at all, an implicit criticism of Macmillan for publishing the novel. Gimson is far more explicit. He criticises Macmillan for failing to practice in-house censorship, so preventing publication of *The Wasp Factory*. Furthermore, he couches this argument within an apparently technical objection to the 'mediocrity' of Banks's first novel as a 'piece of writing'. What is interesting here, is that moral objections to the 'crassly explicit' language and its 'obscene plot' slip into an argument that the novel is technically mediocre.

This is a conflation of technical judgment and moral judgment, two categories which are usually separated by literary critics. As a piece of writing, a bus timetable can be technically perfect, yet most people would not regard it as possessing literary merit, a point made by Eagleton when he considers what defines literature.¹²⁵ It is very unlikely that Gimson as a literary critic would support the argument that all writing is literature for the very status of the profession rests on cultural discrimination. The 'technical' issue which Gimson raises is actually a euphemism, as his focus on the plot and language of *The Wasp Factory* indicates. What Gimson and Craig object to are the way in which *The Wasp Factory*, like all the novels which I have focused upon by Banks, subversively bridges the division between literary and non-literary contemporary fiction. Gimson and Craig seek to prevent this and do so principally by using the issue of obscenity as smokescreen for their aim reinforcing the division between valuable literary fiction and worthless commercial generic dross.

This same approach was also present in a more recent development. In early February 1997, the booksellers, Waterstones', together with Channel 4, released their much publicised '100 Books of the Century.'¹²⁶ Publication of the complete list was linked to a promotional tie-in and a special edition of Waterstones's magazine *W*. During January the company had provided voting boxes within their stores and the final list was compiled from these nominations as well as from a phone-in by viewers of Channel 4. *The Wasp Factory* was placed at number thirty-two. In the special edition of *W* prepared for the public release of the list, Germaine Greer gave 'her verdict

on our reader's poll'. Her comments are intrinsically interesting for their oscillation between a populist and conservative view of contemporary British literary culture, but her comments on the relationship of *The Wasp Factory* to the Waterstones' list are particularly significant.

Greer comments: 'Apparently the late twentieth-century reader has a penchant for any kind of fantasy, infantile, macabre, sadistic, pornographic, pseudo-scientific, supernatural or tortuous'. After hypothesising the role of the writer Roald Dahl to the predilection of readers for 'sinister fantasy' she continues:

Flight from truth does not mean flight from the unpleasant; indeed, some otherwise undistinguished books appear to be valued for their extreme unpleasantness. *A Clockwork Orange* comes in at 27, Iain Banks' *The Wasp Factory* at 32, both ahead of Proust... 127

Like Gimson and Craig, Greer glibly focuses in on the 'extreme unpleasantness' of Banks's novel. Unlike Gimson and Craig, she reproaches readers for having such barbarous tastes thereby casting doubt on the literary, as well as moral, legitimacy of their choices. Her argument is that *The Wasp Factory*, along with other books such as *A Clockwork Orange*, are technically ordinary, but have received such acclaim by readers because late twentieth-century readers have aesthetically and morally dubious tastes. Readers, rather than publishers, are blamed this time for creating *The Wasp Factory's* popularity.

Wade, Gimson, Craig and Greer all converge in their rejection of the *The Wasp Factory's* populist dimensions. But their antipathy to any blurring of the division between serious literary fiction and popular generic fiction, expresses itself through various critical strategies. The populist dimensions of the novel are ignored (Wade); or attacked for their immorality (Gimson and Craig); or readers themselves are reproached for their tastes (Greer). Such literary prejudices in favour of the division between what is seen literature and generic popular non-literature have had a bearing on the

classification of Banks's fiction as a whole.

As a writer, Banks has effectively had two careers. I have focused on what could, imperfectly, be classified as his non-science fiction novels. When writing within the science fiction mode he becomes Iain M. Banks; in his mainstream fictional writing he is simply Iain Banks. This way in which literary guides have handled this dual authorship, and what is effectively one author with two careers, is instructive in revealing the ideological prejudices shown by the literary establishment against the popular and commercial dimensions to Banks's career as a novelist.

The Oxford Companion to English Literature ¹²⁸ and *Larousse Dictionary Of Writers* ¹²⁹ attempt to avoid this potential confusion between the literary and popular aspects of Banks's career as a novelist by pointing out that Menzies is the legitimate middle name of Banks. This is factually correct, and seems neatly to avoid the difficult problem of literary evaluation. *The Companion*, however, then goes on to subtly devalue Banks's career as a science-fiction novelist. It informs readers that 'Iain M. Banks is the name under which Banks has written several science fiction novels' and fails to supply any further details. The implication here is that scrutiny of science fiction novels is not appropriate for a companion to literature. Silence acts as a marker of final judgment by *The Companion*.

The Cambridge Guide To Literature In English considers both sides of Banks's career and notes the 'cybernetic science fantasy' of *Consider Phlebas* but the entry erects an overall chronological division of quality translated into the euphemism of success. It argues that *The Wasp Factory* has not been followed by any novels which have attracted the same measure of success. In the words of the entry: 'None has repeated the success of his debut.'¹³⁰ This is not true by commercial standards. Since 1992 *Complicity* has sold over 200,000 copies in paperback alone and around 10,000 in its hardback edition; *The Crow Road* has sold just over 200,000 copies in paperback and around 20,000 in hardback.¹³¹ In short, novels published after *The Wasp Factory* have been very successful commercially. What *The Cambridge Guide* can only mean is that none of

these novels has received the same level of critical scrutiny as did *The Wasp Factory* upon its publication.

Here then is a subtle indication of what criteria lie behind the *The Cambridge Guide*'s conception of success: the extent to which literary critics and reviewers scrutinise a newly-published novel, not the extent to which a newly-published novel enjoys commercial success. Put another way: the number of critics who review a newly-published novel, not how many readers actually buy a copy. This can be confirmed by looking at its entry on generic fiction. Generic fiction is described as, 'overwhelmingly prompted more by a sense of audience and market and the commercial advantage in satisfying it than by any attempt at individual self-expression.' This definition firmly categorises commercial considerations as antithetical to literary merit and explains the vaguely disparaging tone of the entry on Banks, where the author's literary career is restricted to the 'success' of *The Wasp Factory*. *The Cambridge Guide* pigeonholes Banks as writer of one successful novel - and predictably the one novel which critics reviewed most.

In general, far more serious critical scrutiny has been given to *A Disaffection* and other novels by Kelman than novels by Banks, a disparity which can be emphasised by comparing the length of entries within literary guides. *The Larousse Dictionary Of Writers* devotes 130 words to its entry on Banks, whereas it devotes 322 words to Kelman. *The Times Index* has four entries on *The Wasp Factory*, including two referring to *The Times Literary Supplement* dated 12 February and 16 March 1984.¹³² By way of contrast, references to *How Late It Was, How Late* in the month of October 1994 alone, and not counting reactions to the publication of the novel in late March 1994, fill half an A4 page.¹³³ These entries include eight letters sent by readers who are either outraged by the novel, or alternatively, support it. Similarly, Stevenson, in his account of developments within contemporary British fiction, assigns half a sentence to Banks. In the context of contemporary Scottish novelists he notes '...Ian (sic) Banks's complex mixtures of fantasy, hallucination and reality in *The Bridge*.' Stevenson continues by describing James Kelman as the 'outstanding author of the

late eighties', and devotes a paragraph to him, predictably focusing on *A Disaffection*.¹³⁴

This difference in the extent of critical attention can be partly explained by the observation that Kelman has received several important literary prizes, principally the Booker in 1994, but also The James Tait Memorial Prize in 1990, as well as being short listed for the 1989 Booker Prize. Such official, institutional recognitions of literary merit have led to a snowballing effect whereby critical scrutiny tends to generate a self-perpetuating momentum. This can therefore be seen as a prime example of the interlocking structure of critical practice: whatever one critic misses in one interpretation will be picked up by another critic. Nevertheless, this practical explanation does not wholly account for this large disparity in critical scrutiny.

One other effect of literary accreditation at the hands of critics - the comparisons made between Kelman and Zola, Beckett, Existentialism, Dickens or Shakespeare, as well as the award of literary prizes to Kelman - has been to extend scrutiny of his novels, and their author, beyond newspaper critics and into the academic realm. Novels by Kelman have managed to penetrate into the academic zone of interest far more easily and widely than those by Banks. Roberts for example, has located Kelman within a Glaswegian avant garde, called the 'new Glasgow writing'.¹³⁵ Waugh, problematically, places his novels alongside those by Salman Rushdie and other contemporary British novelists.¹³⁶ Stevenson argues that Kelman's novels profit from, 'traditional and postmodern possibilities'. And he goes so far as to single out Kelman as the best novelist writing at the end of the 1980s.¹³⁷

This strongly implies that important connections exist between the commercial and academic spheres of literary criticism [G] in this country, particularly as regards the selection of which contemporary novels proceed through commercial literary criticism and into an academically-accredited zone of study and commentary. It appears that the amount of commercial criticism which is published about a contemporary author is proportional to the amount of academic criticism which will follow in the near future. This

finding confirms arguments by Gross that commercial literary criticism and reviewing are becoming increasingly indistinguishable from academic criticism.¹³⁸

Certainly, in the debate over the 1994 Booker Prize, the framework of reference used by newspaper critics like Michael Wood demanded that readers have a highly specialised familiarity with nineteenth and twentieth-century European literature.¹³⁹ Indeed, his review, despite being printed in *The Guardian*, was more characteristic of an academic account and can be seen as something of a crossover between academic and commercial literary criticism.

As Wood's article also highlights, it was the case that when reviewing Kelman's novels, academic critics generally proved to be far less conservative in their judgments than commercial critics.¹⁴⁰ This generalisation also holds true for the smaller amount of serious critical scrutiny given to novels by Banks.

Sutherland in his review of *Complicity* and *Against A Dark Background* by Iain M. Banks, sums up the pervasive influence of the *The Wasp Factory* on Banks's subsequent career. He comments:

Say Iain Banks and the person you are talking to will say ' *The Wasp Factory*.' Banks may have as much trouble getting out from under the success of his first novel as did William Golding. ¹⁴¹

Sutherland goes on to argue that the success of *The Wasp Factory* was, however, well deserved and focuses on the transsexual denouement at the end of the novel where in his words, 'Frank, discovers himself not, as he tormentedly imagines, a castrated boy but a hormonally interfered-with girl.'¹⁴² Sutherland identifies two sources for this revelation at the close of the novel 'one academic one profoundly sub-academic'. He argues that this plot device can be traced to Balzac's short story 'Sarrasine' where the girl at the centre of the story is eventually revealed to be a boy. To support his case, Sutherland hypothesises a causal link between Banks's time at Stirling University in the early 1970s when 'It was a period in which S/Z

Roland Barthes's study of 'Sarrasine' was all the academic rage.' He then argues, 'the other influence on Banks's binaristic obsessions is the S.F. writer Philip K. Dick - master of alternative universes and split characters.'¹⁴³

I am suspicious of this explanation. As was shown earlier, well-disposed literary critics tended to focus on *A Disaffection* because they could insert the novel into all manner of literary traditions; because they saw the novel as conducive to their critical vocabulary. I theoretically analysed this as a way of accommodating the politically troublesome author Kelman into an agenda which diverted attention away from the political issues which *A Disaffection* and other novels by Kelman raise about contemporary literary culture in Britain. I argued that this was the result of an accommodation between liberal and conservative wings of the literary establishment, a compromise which had the resulted in the political domestication of *A Disaffection* and other novels by Kelman - an ideological strategy of containment and appropriation.

Sutherland's review is broadly sympathetic in tone, but this accommodation is based on an elision of some of the wider political dimensions which are central to analysing novels by Banks properly. As with those critics who interpreted Kelman as an 'Existentialist' novelist or working within the 'decent human socialism' of Dickens,¹⁴⁴ accommodating novels by Banks through a policy of ideological containment creates problems.

For example, Sutherland recognises the political and interpretive problems which are created when critics and readers pigeonhole Banks as writer of *The Wasp Factory*. He comments that Banks will 'have trouble getting out from under' the pervasive influence of his first published novel.¹⁴⁵ And the phrase 'getting out from under' indicates his belief that such categorising procedures are potentially damaging to a writer's career because they tend to give a distorted view of a novelist's writings as a whole, but then Sutherland continues - in contradiction - by going on to point out how the 'binarisms' of *The Wasp Factory* can be used to explain key features of Banks's career as a writer, as well as important features of specific novels

like *Canal Dreams*. Furthermore, in his account he installs *The Wasp Factory* as a critical benchmark. *Complicity*, which he is reviewing for the *London Review Of Books*, is described, for example, as 'Banks's best novel since *The Wasp Factory*.'¹⁴⁶

Similarly, Sutherland, to his credit, recognises the black humour which is integral to *The Wasp Factory*. Indeed, he praises the novel's ability to, 'create maximum consternation in the reader.' Sutherland recognises that Banks manipulates reader expectations in the novel, and this, according to his critical judgment, is a sign of the novel's literary merit. But when Sutherland recognises this same narrative device in *Against A Dark Background*, by Iain M. Banks, he suddenly indicates his irritation. He comments that the novel ends 'none too soon'. This is unconvincingly explained by reference to Banks's Scottish nationality. Sutherland argues that *Complicity* is Banks's best novel since *The Wasp Factory* because 'One of its strengths is that it is rooted in contemporary Scotland, which Banks knows as a native.'¹⁴⁷

Sutherland is mistaken when he describes *Canal Dreams* as a novel, 'intertwining S.F. with straight fiction.'¹⁴⁸ *Canal Dreams* is loosely within the thriller genre; it has no affinities with science fiction whatsoever. Sutherland is possibly referring to *Walking On Glass*, which, as I pointed out in Chapter Two, intermingles fantasy and realistic narrative streams. He goes on to argue that *The Bridge* is Kafkaesque allegory and that it is Banks's, 'least successful effort'. Sutherland ignores *Espedair Street* altogether. What is odd about these classifications is the extent to which they seek to expunge the popular dimensions from Banks's non-science fiction novels. *Walking On Glass* - if he is referring to the novel - is glossed over altogether, *Espedair Street* is ignored, and *The Bridge* is dismissed as the Banks's, 'least successful novel'. This is particularly significant given the content and generic structures of all three novels. *Espedair Street* is largely an examination of popular culture. *The Bridge* intermingles effects from the fantasy genre with realism, even if the novel cannot be classed as wholly fantasy or science fiction, it certainly uses narrative devices from within both genres. *Walking On Glass* similarly interweaves science fiction/fantasy

narratives with realism. As was shown in Chapter Two, all three novels contain marvelously accurate satire on the kinds of literary values which police contemporary fiction

In fact, Sutherland meticulously avoids the popular, and populist, edge to Banks's novels and takes an extremely selective view of the novelist's publications. Selecting *The Wasp Factory* and *Complicity* as the best of these novels, as well as the kind of interpretation into which they are squeezed, makes for a very limited cross-section of Bank's writings. It seems to disclose that Banks can be admitted into the academic zone of interest and study, but only after the popular and populist appeals of his novels have been denied. Although, to be fair to Sutherland, it is possible that he simply likes *Complicity* and *The Wasp Factory* more than any other of Banks's novels. If this is the case then it surely would have been more open if Sutherland had cited personal taste as his prime criteria for analysis rather than weave an unconvincing web involving Scottishness and postmodern duality. This is made all the more ironic given that Sutherland praises *Complicity* for its convincing and perceptive representation of political disaffection.¹⁴⁹

Nairn, refreshingly, is open about the criteria behind his analysis of Banks. He openly cites personal preference as the reason behind his focus on Banks's non-science fiction novels. Nairn is also careful to signal that this should not be seen as implying any kind of literary value-judgement about the science fiction genre as a whole, or Banks's science fiction novels in particular. Nevertheless, Nairn's account is also shot through with subtle contradictions which arise from his determination to review Banks's novels sympathetically, while also accommodating them within an interpretive template which is recognisable to the literary establishment.

For example, he commends the authorial control which Banks accomplishes in *The Bridge*, a control, Nairn argues, which is all the more remarkable given the complex interaction between its multiple narratives. He tells readers: 'Banks never loses control, guiding us [the readers] through the elaborate web of his novel.' He continues:

In this work and elsewhere, his success is first and foremost as a storyteller, rather than a prime innovator. In fact, Banks's success as a storyteller is largely based on a readiness and a capacity to assimilate such a diverse menu of already existing literary techniques.¹⁵⁰

The comparison between innovator and storyteller is significant. It indicates Nairn's opinion that Banks fails to fulfil any criteria as an original, innovative writer. Indeed, the term storyteller describes a literary division of labour. A storyteller entertains their audience by wittily relaying stories which already exist; storytellers do not create new narratives, they simply tell already existing narratives in an entertaining fashion. They are the workhorses of literary culture, the literary proletarians. Whereas, and by implicit contrast, the truly original artist creates new narratives, which as Bloom conservatively argues, send ripples of originality through literary culture and whose universalism according to him transcends all historical or generic context.¹⁵¹ By pigeonholing Banks as a storyteller, Nairn actually uses an extremely conservative concept which is shot through with an ideology of cultural hierarchy.

Nairn does not fully accept the conservatism which sometimes leaks through his account and this spawns some interesting contradictions. One key way in which Nairn's article attempts to smooth over these potential problems, is through use of the label post-modern. By appropriating Banks as a post-modern novelist, he attempts to legitimise critical scrutiny of Banks's novels when his argument actually implies that Banks is a far less original and therefore less significant writer than he is willing to admit. Alongside arguing that Banks is a mere storyteller, Nairn argues that *Walking On Glass* and *The Bridge* exemplify the fusion of post-modern 'stylistic pyrotechnics' with 'blunt fiction or largely fantastic science fiction scenarios' and that seen from this perspective, novels by Banks indicate that he is writing within a Scottish tradition as well as a wider international movement. Nairn argues that *The Bridge* and *Walking On Glass*:

...do bear some oblique comparison with the Ballads, with Tam O' Shanter, with R.L. Stevenson, with *A Voyage to Arcturus* (1920), with

MacDiarmid's later, stranger excursions, or with some of the work of Muriel Spark and Edwin Morgan, as well as Alisdair (sic) Gray. But there are also related developments in the writings of Umberto Eco, Thomas Pynchon, Keri Hulme, or Gunter Grass.¹⁵²

And he goes on to argue that, 'recognition of some of these affinities...help make Banks seem a less odd or isolated figure.'¹⁵³

Locating Banks within a post-modernist rubric can be seen as an institutional strategy, a way of authorising Nairn's analysis as a critic, of novels which are actually antithetical to the kind of literary ideology which he half-heartedly applies. Post-modernism therefore figures as a kind of reassurance within his account, a means of certifying that although Banks might be a popular writer, his novels do have literary merit because they can be seen within a suitably academic framework. Mike Featherstone, has produced a useful analysis of how post-modernism has been used to legitimate the struggles of subordinate, or peripheral, groups of intellectuals within cultural institutions - a label which makes their cultural practices more acceptable to the establishment. He comments:

The art of *naming* is itself an important strategy on the part of groups engaged with other groups. The use of a term like post-modernism by outsiders or newcomers to the field may occur when their chances to move upwards through the existing legitimate hierarchical structures are restricted. ¹⁵⁴

Introducing post-modernism then, can be seen as a way of overcoming institutional restrictions which are real or imagined. This is illuminating when applied to the contradictions which plague Nairn's account.

These contradictions come from the operation of two opposed critical perspectives. On the one hand, Nairn has an obvious personal enthusiasm for *The Bridge* and other novels, yet, as a critic, he cannot shake off his institutional role as a arbiter and upholder of literature. Banks's novels draw their energies from popular culture as well as the literary culture, therefore they create a problem for Nairn because they are not wholly conducive to the kind of literary ideology which he as a professional critic is expected,

and obviously expects himself, to uphold. *Walking On Glass* satirises this literary ideology, particularly its elitist practice of condemning popular culture as worthless. Introducing post-modernism is a way of negotiating between these conflicting personal and institutional positions. By describing Banks as a post-modernist writer and his novels as examples of post-modernist practice, Nairn makes the popular and subversive dimensions of *Walking On Glass* and other novels more acceptable - they can be recognised by the rest of the critical establishment because they are within an established theoretical framework. The pointed criticisms which *Walking On Glass* and *The Bridge* make about the elitism of literary culture in contemporary Britain also have their political edge taken away. Their subversive dimensions can be interpreted as post-modern characteristics, rather than a criticism of the relationship between cultural inequality and other kinds of social or political inequality in contemporary Britain.

As with Sutherland's account, this accommodation predictably leads to a limited and flawed evaluation of Banks's novels. For example the constant literary allusions of *Walking On Glass* are not interpreted by Nairn as a satire upon the critical practice of finding literary precedents for texts, and therefore a swipe at the criteria by which critics and academics can claim that a text has, or does not have, literary merit, but are instead interpreted as an example of self-reflexive post-modernist cheekiness, as a kind of post-modernism which satirises itself. Nairn then goes on to reduce this to yet another tradition-in-the-making when he argues: 'Several commentators have recently remarked that we may already be in the midst of a post-postmodernist age, where the post-modern itself becomes the butt of elaborate jokes.'¹⁵⁵ The only joke here is the elaborate unfeasibility of Nairn's interpretation.

Here then is a practical, as well as political, reason why Banks's novels have generally received far less serious critical scrutiny than those by Kelman: they have proved to be far more difficult to insert into canonical pigeonholes as examples of post-modern, Existential, socialist-humanist, Scottish, proletarian, or any other canon of literature. They tend to resist such exercises of literary codification. This can be developed, once again,

by applying Gramsci's focus upon the 'productive' aspect of practices by literary critics. Literary critics have had difficulty in using Banks's novels to reproduce dominant ideologies about literature and about what defines literary merit. I put my research findings to Banks, and, given the extent to which novels like *The Wasp Factory* and *Walking On Glass* caricature the forces of established literary, aesthetic, and moral judgments, his rebellious tone was unsurprising:

I take your point about the lack of serious critical appraisal of my books and, yes I guess it is because I'm seen as a relatively popular writer rather than a real Eng. Lit. writer...The price of self-indulgence and one which I'm perfectly happy to live with. 156

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Chapter 4 Publishing

Introduction and Overview

One of the most striking contrasts since 1979 has been between the mood of literary academics and that of literary commerce generally. This has a certain irony. While literary evaluation became the subject of renewed soul-searching and controversy within the Humanities, publishers, booksellers and the print-media confidently used anchor points of valuation to reinvigorate literary markets. They suffered none of the pessimism, uncertainty, or relativism which Hoggart detects with regard to academic attitudes about cultural evaluation.¹ Instead, they offered readers an extended 'generation' of contemporary 'quality British' novelists: Ian McEwan, Martin Amis, Alasdair Grey, Irvine Welsh, Roddy Doyle, Ben Okri, Jeanette Winterson, Salman Rushdie, Iain Banks and James Kelman. Literary prizes such as the Booker defined a canon of 'quality' newly-published fiction for readers, while also assuming a 'showbiz' persona of glamour and glitz.² More space was given over to literary reviews and literary gossip in the broadsheet press than previously.³

Underpinning the growth in literary or 'highbrow' fiction was its increased profitability.⁴ Rather than being subsidised by mass-market fiction the 'literary' or 'quality' market came to figure as a significant source of profit for publishers and booksellers. The massive growth of the chain bookstores Waterstones and Dillons completely altered retail bookselling in Britain, and combined entrepreneurial business acumen with an ethos based around providing consumers with a well-stocked bookstore, 'in every major town in Great Britain and Ireland.'⁵ As Bradbury observes, the 1980s have, in retrospect, come to be seen as a period during which, contrary to pessimistic predictions, the novel, particularly the British novel, was booming.⁶ The Scottish novel was also said to be undergoing a Renaissance. Todd comments that the British book-buyer has 'never had it

so good'.⁷

In parallel with this vibrancy was a series of technological, ideological and structural changes within publishing and bookselling. Small to medium-sized British publishers were swallowed by globalising multi-media conglomerates.⁸ Inside the corporate structure increasing pressure was placed on literary editors to maximise profits and justify decisions in the light of profit margins.⁹ Rapid advances in computer technology allowed far better stock control (in theory at least) and allowed publishers and booksellers to overcome a problem which had historically plagued both industries.¹⁰ Desktop publishing was born, promising cheaper initial production costs and the financial viability of smaller print runs, both of which potentially benefited small or independent publishers without any access to large capital reserves.

Publishers seemed to shake off the conservatism which has historically marked the industry, and adopted far more brashly commercial practices. In parallel with the music industry, a book 'chart' was introduced. Marketing departments grew and market research was used to identify the social class, buying habits, gender and dispositions of the book-buying public.¹¹ Bodies like Book Marketing Limited (B.M.L.) were set up in 1988 to take advantage of these new attitudes and provide bookselling and publishing with sophisticated data about markets. Professionalism became a key asset in the commercial-cultural vocabulary which rapidly grew in publishing during the period. An N.V.Q. (National Vocational Qualification) was developed.¹² Publishing was established as an area of study and accreditation within British Higher Education: degrees in publishing are now available.

That symbol of gentlemanly price-fixing, the Net Book Agreement, finally collapsed in 1995.¹³ Its collapse was symbolic of the triumph of a more hard-nosed business rationality within publishing and bookselling over and above traditional affiliations.¹⁴ Its demise also signalled a shifting balance of power in the relations between production and between distribution. Publishers could no longer dictate terms to booksellers and tell them what

level of pricing was appropriate. The growth of the chain bookstores, Dillons and Waterstones, had created powerful distribution networks.¹⁵ During a period of greater competition and corporate pressure for larger profit margins, most publishers could hardly ignore the buying power possessed by these chains. Paradoxically, increased competition within publishing, as well as the demands of a corporate economy, required increased cross-industry cooperation between publishers and booksellers.

Novels by Kelman and Banks, as well as the authors themselves, were promoted, packaged, assessed, published and sold within this commercial-cultural environment. My aim in this chapter is to set out how it relates to their writings, particularly in terms of how both novelists were promoted by publishers and booksellers. As Todd notes this period of reorganisation and activity in British literary culture is fascinating, not least because of its sheer scope and vigour.¹⁶ It is consequently worthy of a thesis on its own account. For brevity I therefore focus on specific examples of how the writings of Banks and Kelman can be related to an analysis of contemporary publishing and bookselling.

I also take this as an opportunity to reject prominent methodological objections towards a sociological approach to literature, because study of contemporary novels through an understanding of market institutions and arrangements is a thoroughly sociological approach. Arguments about the difficulty of examining the commercial and institutional dimensions of contemporary novels are usually arguments against this approach per se. As this introduction has outlined, it is also the case that notions of literary value and valuation are of central relevance to the everyday commercial business of contemporary literary culture. As was outlined in Chapter One, some academics might feel that literary value and valuation are no longer relevant or viable practices for literary study, but this does not tally with the way in which valuation and evaluation are referred to by bookshops, publishers or authors like Kelman. Consequently investigation of the political effects and social relationships of literary evaluation is best supported not by denouncing evaluation as some kind of bourgeois or patriarchal construct, but by looking at how practices of valuation and

evaluation are referred to by publishers and booksellers, along with literary critics, authors and ultimately readers.

Objections to a Sociological Approach to Literature

Objections to a sociological approach to literature have usually taken two forms. In the first, as exemplified by Bloom, sociology and rational enquiry are portrayed as the outright enemy of a sensitive approach to great art, or more chauvinistically, as some kind of continental attack on the sensibilities and standards of Anglo-American literary culture. It is to ward off such a reaction that Ernest Pick, translator of Escarpit's *Sociology Of Literature*, prefaces Escarpit's book with a defence of what follows. He begins:

Readers have long been accustomed to a traditional approach to literature which seeks to interpret a literary work as an entity unrelated to both the writer's life and his environment. Even the literary purist, however, is aware of the social conditions surrounding the birth, distribution and consumption of any given work.¹⁷

The second objection is more subtle and essentially argues that while sociological approaches to literature are not, in principle, contrary to literary study, they tend to be difficult to use productively in research and teaching. Sutherland, has emphasised the methodological problems which come with using data about publishing and bookselling, and his account is a good example of this second variety of objection:

...in a class the teacher will turn to chapter 21 of her text of *Middlemarch* - say a battered 1887 Blackwood's 'Cabinet' volume bought twenty years since, when she was a student herself, for 6d in a second-hand bookshop. The class meanwhile will turn to a corresponding passage in the text-say the 1989 World's Classics bought last week from a stack in the campus Bookstore for £4.50. both parties can happily assume that they are discussing the same book... But if we make the genealogical effort to see them, the wholly commercial processes that produced the 1887 cheap

uniform reissue of Eliot's novel for 'the common reader' are radically different from the academic-commercial processes that produced the authoratively edited paperback primarily for the education market.¹⁸

The strongest argument against both categories of objection is that they are unnecessary. It is not necessary to reject a sociological approach to literary study on the grounds that it destroys appreciation of great art, or because, according to the second category, it is too difficult to use. Neither are true, and in the following chapter I will outline a sociological approach to contemporary publishing and bookselling which enriches study of the novels of Banks and Kelman. By implication this can also enrich study of other contemporary British novelists.

Nevertheless, both forms of objection also need to be tackled in a more direct manner. As I showed in Chapter One, Bloom's rejection of rationalism is linked to his call for a return to absolute forms of evaluation. In turn, he uses this premise as a reason for rejecting contemporary, and particularly popular, literary forms. The literary researcher or teacher is asked to reject what are described as the commercial 'sound bites' of contemporary culture.¹⁹ I made my arguments in Chapter One against this romantic and elitist agenda. But one central argument will suffice here: if literary study cannot try to account for the whole of literary culture, including its contemporary and popular dimensions, then it can hardly claim to be a forward-looking or relevant area of research and teaching. As Milner argues, if this is the case then perhaps the time has come to install literary studies within cultural studies.²⁰

Sutherland's objection is more subtle, but ultimately comes to rest on the argument that study of publishing and bookselling should be located within an annexe of literary study. He argues that 'Publishing history is after all, extraordinary distracting stuff.'²¹ This is an extremely negative argument, particularly since it comes close on the heels of his *Middlemarch* example which I included a moment ago, where he admits that, by way of a little research, huge differences can be shown to exist in the commercial processes which produced the 1887 Blackwood cabinet volume and the

1989 World's Classics edition. His *Middlemarch* example emphasises what an important role publishing and bookselling have played in developing the relationship between educational and commercial markets. It also begs the question of how publishers and booksellers might have fostered certain formal expectations and conventions among different reading constituencies, and how these affect the way students approach *Middlemarch* today. In place of these fascinating questions, Sutherland proposes to marginalise key elements of a sociological approach to literature. The baby is not thrown out with the bathwater, but rather locked up in the attic on account of its 'difficult' nature. With respect to the argument that sociological enquiry destroys our appreciation of art, Williams has perfectly captured the way in which marginalising a sociological approach to culture can act as a cover for more gross objections, such as those outlined by Harold Bloom :

We now have the sociology, it is sometimes said, but where is the art? This is usually a reasonable question. It is true that there is one unreasonable apparent form of it, which is intended, really, to halt the whole enquiry. Certain sociological facts and considerations are hastily admitted, usually in a received and well-worn form, and some minor place is reserved for them. But then, we understand, the real work can begin; we go to 'the works of art themselves'. 22

This is the danger in what Sutherland proposes.

Once these objections are avoided, real potential problems with a sociological approach to literature can be identified and bypassed. Prominent among these is the danger that attention to the economics of cultural production can overwhelm meaning in a novel, play or poem. This is the legitimate concern which Williams identifies above. There is a real danger in studying literature without attention to the aesthetic, emotional and psychological effects which all artforms, to some extent or other, rely upon, without attention to them as art and something rather more than simply commodities on the market.

Storey calls this danger a 'political economy' approach and correctly

argues that it 'threatens to collapse everything back into the economic.'²³ He convincingly argues that an understanding of the production of cultural forms needs to be complemented by an analysis of how consumers use these items symbolically: what cultural and social meanings readers and audiences invest in these forms or artefacts, as well as how formal conventions, or the marketing department of a major publisher, can help to organise these meanings in socially significant ways.

This perspective also nicely bypasses the potential pitfall of perceiving readers or audiences as dupes of capitalist ideology, a tendency which is always present when describing the economic and cultural power of cultural industries. This is because Storey's approach describes them as active - appropriating cultural goods for their own uses, rather than unquestioningly accepting ready-made meanings handed down by capitalist cultural industries. He provides a good example of this process in relation to the music industry:

Rather than dictating to a passive market the music industry finds it very difficult to control the musical tastes of consumers. This is because there is always a difference between the exchange value (economic value) and use value (cultural value). The music industry can control the first, but is consumers who *make* the second.²⁴

Storey's argument here is backed up by my research. Publishers of fiction have found it very difficult to predict which titles will do well, there is always a risk factor in their calculations, particularly when a new writer is released on to the market. This is relevant to Banks and Kelman. In an interview conducted in 1987, Banks emphasised the calculated risk which Macmillan and his then editor, James Hale, took with publication of *The Wasp Factory*. About his relationship to Macmillan, Banks has commented:

I felt a certain loyalty towards them - if not the company themselves, then certainly to my editor, who was the chap who decided to take the risk and publish *The Wasp Factory*. It certainly wasn't a guaranteed success; he knew it was going to

offend a lot of people and any new book by a complete unknown has a very good chance of disappearing without a trace.²⁵

As a writer, Kelman almost disappeared 'without a trace'. Puckerbush Press, an American publisher, took the initial risk and his first book, *An Old Pub Near The Angel and Other Stories*, came out in 1973. It was ten years on till Kelman managed to get anything else published: *Not Not While The Giro* was accepted by Polygon in 1983. In an interview, Professor Philip Hobsbaum, who ran the writers' group which Kelman occasionally attended during the 1970s, recollected that, 'For some time, it looked like he wasn't going to make it. It is just so hard to get a collection of stories published.'²⁶ First at Puckerbush Press and later at Polygon, Kelman, like Banks, would appear to have found sympathetic editors who were willing to take a chance and gamble on his success with readers.

Nevertheless, emphasising consumer power also has its potential drawbacks. As I said in Chapter One, Hoggart, is right to criticise the way in which some approaches within cultural studies embrace 'the popular' as an alternative to facing up to difficult questions about the viability of cultural discrimination. In rejecting what Storey, calls the 'political economy' perspective and by embracing 'the popular' as a site of resistance, it is possible to forget that the cultural industries have, to some extent, helped to organise and create the networks of meaning which readers and audiences gain from artforms. Publishers and booksellers have a role in organising notions of literary merit and consequently accepting a 'consumer power' view of literary production is liable to simply support how they, for partisan commercial reasons, already organise the marketplace.

Neither the 'political economy', nor 'consumer power' approach offer, I think, a useful way forward for critically studying publishing and bookselling. Worpole has proposed an alternative however. In his account he draws attention to the history of independent publishing and bookselling in Britain and to publishing initiatives by gay, working-class, and feminist groups. As he points out, many of these groups work on pre-capitalist forms

of book distribution, selling copies of working-class autobiographies, or poetry anthologies, on a door-to-door basis in the communities where they live.²⁷ Independent, radical, and/or non-capitalist literary production has a culturally important history in Britain and, in the face of conglomerate mainstream literary production, it is easy to overlook the independent sector.

Many booksellers such as 'Independent Bookshop' in Sheffield, were set up in order to offer the book-buying public a cultural, political, and economic alternative to W.H. Smiths, Dillons, Waterstones, and Transworld. Worpole comments

Capitalist rationality has a way of presenting itself as the obvious way of organising things. A look at what market forces have done to publishing, the culture of literacy, the 'common treasury' of literature, the world of the book, suggests at a glance that there could be other ways of creating a popular critical literary culture other than that determined by the accounts departments of the major paperback publishing houses. ²⁸

I agree entirely. But I think that this is also a strong vindication of a sociological approach to contemporary literature, for two interconnected reasons. Politically, because understanding and demonstrating how an alternative 'critical literary culture' is thwarted by market forces helps to understand how it might be encouraged in the future. Intellectually, because understanding the role of publishers and booksellers in contemporary literary culture enriches an analytical approach to contemporary British fiction. It is this second 'intellectual' objective to which I now turn.

A Theoretical Analysis of Contemporary Publishing

Publishing is one of the strangest industries and some of its idiosyncrasies present problems for any analysis. For example, publishing houses and booksellers deal with a commodity which has remained largely unchanged since Caxton. This oddity has struck other writers. Sutherland writes 'The book is extraordinarily the same thing it has always been.'²⁹ Sutherland's emphasis on the extraordinary physical stasis of the book draws attention to the fact that other, more modern, forms of communication have usually undergone substantive physical changes as technological innovations in production have altered their basic substance.

Feather, in his comprehensive survey of the history of British publishing, emphasises how the contemporary definition of a publisher is premised upon capitalist commodity relations. He comments:

It is perhaps easier to define what a publisher does not do. He does not write books. He does not print them, or bind them. He does not sell them to those who will read them. He is essentially a middleman between author and reader...³⁰

Feather adds, 'the publisher is, in the most literal sense, the capitalist of the world of books.'³¹

Yet, strangely, publishers have frequently seen themselves as having a key cultural role within the nation state. Allen Lane, for example, likened himself to a cultural philanthropist, and argued that that by providing 'GOOD BOOKS CHEAP (Penguin's original advertising slogan) he was widening the cultural horizons for 'a vast reading public.'³² Such sentiments sit oddly with the capitalist rationality which lies at the centre of publishing and the role of the modern publisher.

One of the key problems within this more general difficulty of how to define the cultural role of the book, is the question of how to account for it in relation to other forms such as the newspaper. This is particularly germane to any study of publishing and bookselling because, as Worpole points out,

literary production in Britain has historically embraced a huge variety of textual forms, many of which would not be defined as books. Worpole lists some of this diversity:

...ballads, summonses, prayer-books, political squibs, fairy tales, newspapers, magazines, comics, novels on blue paper, thin collections of poetry, block-busting paperbacks, biology textbooks, almanacs, dictionaries, manifestoes, collected works, occasional papers, discussion documents, utopias...³³

Willison argues that research into the history of the book can be aided by considering the book as 'one sub-set' within a 'History of the Text' rather than that of the book, and further, that this history should involve, non-book forms 'such as newspapers, maps, film and even oral utterance.' His proposal has several outstanding advantages.³⁴

The notion of the book is irrevocably caught-up with long-standing and fundamental ideas about cultural evaluation. Any incisive study of continuity and change within these processes of evaluation and valuation needs to step outside of such pervasive cultural processes. As Willison points out, 'uncouth' as it may sound, text offers a more neutral, and therefore methodologically powerful, alternative to book.³⁵ Worpole's emphasis on the diversity of forms which have been produced at one time or other in Britain also emphasises how the market and market institutions have played a key role in organising literacy and notions of literary value based around differences between literary forms. A key aim of this chapter is to assess how these processes operate and consequently it is appropriate not to base it on distinctions already organised by the market. A history of the text consequently offers a more neutral purchase than a history of the book.

Another advantage with study of the history of text directly concerns Banks's novels. As was underlined in Chapters Two and Three, one of the most striking things about his novels is the extent to which they call upon a wide range of styles, forms and conventions taken from forms which are designed to be communicated via what Willison dubs 'post-print' media: cinema, radio and television.³⁶ *Espedair Street*, for example, is peppered

with simulated pop-music lyrics. Weir, its central character, offers the reader verses from the songs which have ensured his fortune:

I am old, my thoughts get blown like ash
By the winds of grief and pain,
Young minds only do not fear such blasts,
Which but serve to fan the flame. (p. 5)

And, in an almost self-mocking, throwaway popular style:

Why do you bite me on the shoulder,
Why do you scratch me on the back?
Why do you always have to make love
Like you're making an attack? (p.5)

This osmosis, or leakiness, between different forms of text designed for a wide range of mediums, also operates in an reversed sense. During November 1996, a screen version of *The Crow Road* was televised in a six-part serialisation on BBC2. There have also been persistent, if so far unsuccessful, plans for a cinematic version of *The Wasp Factory*.³⁷ Banks has also disclosed that his childhood experience of television and cinema formed the backbone for his subsequent novelistic writings. It could further be argued that the popularity of *The Wasp Factory* and other novels by the author, owe something to their stylistic affiliations with popular mediums such as television, cinema and pop music.

Novels by Banks exemplify the need to analyse the contemporary novel alongside other forms of textuality and other cultural mediums. But this also touches on a fundamental issue for any theoretical account of contemporary publishing and bookselling: how to analyse their relationship with other sectors of cultural production. Gross underlines the role of television in popularising literature.³⁸ Worpole, in his lucid account of contemporary publishing and popular fiction, also notes this systematic osmosis between print and post-print sectors of cultural production.³⁹ Worpole, however, sees such cross-media tendencies as manifestations of the capitalist rationality which is buried in the centre of contemporary

cultural production: 'One of the features of the capitalist leisure industry,' he comments, 'is the economic compulsion to market the same essential commodity in as many different forms as possible.'⁴⁰

I think that the idea of a 'capitalist leisure industry' entails one central problem. It contains the implication that publishing is part of a coherent economic formation within capitalism and consequently tends to play down any conflict or friction between different sectors of cultural production. Some publishers and booksellers have consistently seen television, cinema and other media as threats rather than allies. As Feather also argues, while change and continuity in the industry should not be divorced from wider social processes, or from economic and commercial developments in other industries, it is also proper to acknowledge that publishing and bookselling have a unique history with some unique customs, ideologies and practices.⁴¹ What this suggests is the need to analyse relations within contemporary cultural production in terms of what Williams described as 'relative autonomy'.⁴² This model can, furthermore, be enriched by loosely applying some of the synoptic narratives offered by Willison, and which are intended as a framework around which to construct a History of the Book in Britain.

Willison construes the history of publishing after 1914 as marked by strategies to manage an increasing textual pluralisation and compete with the development of post-print cultural technologies such as cinema, radio and television. He argues that post-print sectors of cultural production were both 'independent yet competitive to publishing'.⁴³ Further, he contends that this further fragmented 'cultural levels' by challenging the preeminence of print as the central cultural form, and argues that this fragmentation intensified during the 1960s, leaving 'virtually autonomous subsets of text, each (perhaps) serving its own subculture, yet all suspended as it were within the media totality...' ⁴⁴

Willison's thesis supports the more general cultural fragmentation and media saturation which is identified by Hobsbawm in his analysis of the arts after 1950. Plurality and fragmentation, have also been central to claims

about the post-modern character of contemporary culture. Hoggart, and Easthope identify the variety of cultural media after 1950 as central to the way in which cultural value and authority were eroded and in Chapter One I suggested the tone and timing of current debates over evaluation were also related to these ongoing processes of cultural disorder.

Willison argue that one of the ways in which publishing responded to these challenges was 'the attempt (by exhortation perhaps more than by substantial internal reorganisation) to further professionalise mainstream publishing.'⁴⁵ Arguments, to the effect that publishing needs to be more professional are extremely common in the period after 1914. For example, writing in 1929, Young, in his *Books: From The Manuscript To The Bookseller*, noted:

The business of book publishing has recently occupied considerable public attention in the press. There seems to be a general impression that while those engaged in other trades and professions have advanced with the times, the trade or profession of publishing has lagged behind. ⁴⁶

This general impression has continued. Writing in 1993, Andrew Welham, marketing director of Penguin, argued that, 'book publishing has always been the province of committed enthusiasts,' and lambasted the industry for its amateurism.⁴⁷ Baverstock, similarly criticises publishing and bookselling for a failure to adopt dynamic and sophisticated contemporary marketing techniques.⁴⁸ Howard, in his semi-autobiographical account of the history of Jonathan Cape, describes the erratic, antiquated and unprofessional practices of the firm right up until the early 1960s.⁴⁹

I began this account of publishing by describing the contradiction between the idea of publisher as cultural agent, and a publisher's actual economic location as capitalist entrepreneur. This conflict is essential to understanding the recent history of publishing. Young succinctly writes, 'A publisher is concerned on the one hand with scholastic or imaginative or poetic affairs, and on the other with pounds, shillings and pence.'⁵⁰ Howard describes this conflict in fascinating detail.

In 1955 Robert Knittel was appointed as senior editor at Cape and Howard describes how 'he welcomed' him as a possible ally in attempts to introduce more dynamic and professional policies at the company, and in the face of a conservative resistance from the older founders of the firm.⁵¹ Howard,⁵² along with Baverstock,⁵³ draws attention to the generational context of this tension between prestige and profit, particularly the way in which an older generation within some publishers resisted some of the more aggressively capitalist methods of organisation, marketing and management.

In despair at rising overheads and low sales, Howard wrote to his father. His letter frankly describes how older ideas about the cultural status of the publisher are outdated within a commercial environment where cultural production, along with other commodity production, is increasingly pluralised, dynamic and competitive. As Howard says, publishing 'good books' is no longer enough:

Now that there are so many books published, all competing with other as well as with the other marginal consumer goods in great and ever more attractive profusion, it can no longer be true that so long as you have good books the public will demand and get them...I have become increasingly certain that one must compete in the terms of advances, in advertising, in production, standards and in content.⁵⁴

One of the key ways in which publishers sought to overcome this potential contradiction and combine increased profitability with the idea of quality, was by reorganising format, and it is around format that the tensions between market and cultural values can be most clearly seen.

Allen Lane's 'Penguin Revolution' is an obvious example of this tension. Lane sought to overcome the gap between perceptions of quality and the need for profitability by marketing 'the Penguin revolution' as a culturally and politically progressive initiative within publishing. It was by emphasising the politically progressive and intellectual nature of his venture, that he hoped to avoid the charge of peddling low-quality non-

literature.⁵⁵ As Feather argues, Lane's greatest commercial insight was his realization that the book market could be radically extended to the vast literate audiences created by 'technologically-driven as well as commercially-driven mass democracy'.⁵⁶

Carey notes how a vast potential market for cultural goods had arisen, particularly among the suburban lower middle-class, during the early part of the twentieth-century.⁵⁷ Carey's analysis of the class basis of this new audience, is significant in the light of Feather's observation that, 'Lane was a man of middlebrow tastes, and he published books for people like himself.'⁵⁸ George Bowling in Orwell's *Coming Up For Air* is a model of this new 'middlebrow' reading-public. Bowling, the suburban insurance salesman and novel's narrator, is quite aware that he is one of the lower-middle class masses, who lives in one of the ranks of little 'semi-detached' house with: 'The stucco front, the creosoted gate, the privet hedge, the green front door,' and who decorate their semi-detached with a name designed to add a touch of cultural distinction, but which Orwell satirically implies, simply become awful cliches: 'The Laurels, the Myrtles, the Hawthorns, Mon Abri, Mon Repos, Belle Vue' (p. 438). Bowling and his wife subscribe to the Left Book Club which was set up by Gollancz in 1936 to offer selected books at cheaper prices. Gollancz and Lane had some important links.

It was Gollancz, who, like Lane, appealed to this 'middlebrow' market in his mainstream publishing, and who was also in competition with Lane for the new mass-market.⁵⁹ In *Coming Up For Air*, Orwell emphasises how price, rather than format, influenced the purchasing-decisions of the readership which Lane and Gollancz targeted. Bowling, for example, describes how his wife, Hilda, liked the Left Book Club because it offered cheap books and appealed to her petit bourgeois sense of thrift:

I think it was in '36 that news of the Left Book Club got to West Bletchley. I joined it soon afterwards, and it's almost the only time I can remember spending money without Hilda protesting. She can see some sense in buying a book when you're getting it for a third of its proper price. (p. 514)

The implication here is that the new suburban petit bourgeoisie was able to access literary culture 'on the cheap' thanks to these cultural innovations. Orwell, however outlines his reservations about the wider cultural effects of this development. *Coming Up For Air* argues that there is a fundamental incompatibility between mass-production and quality. This is conveyed to readers by using food as a motif for mass-production. In an effective analogy Bowling describes the sickening taste of a frankfurter which bursts in his mouth 'like a rotten pear.' Bowling further points to this disgusting inauthenticity as a metaphor for the 'modern world': 'I'd bitten into the modern world and discovered what it was really made of. That's the way we're going nowadays. Everything slick and streamlined, everything made out of something else.' He adds: 'But when you get your teeth into something solid, a sausage for instance, that's what you get. Rotten fish in a rubber skin. Bombs of filth bursting inside your mouth' (p. 413). This symbolism emphasises that exploitation, inauthenticity, and even deception, are the overriding emotions of a consumer society.

Feather points out that the modern paperback was seen as a sign of cultural decline when it was first introduced by Lane, 'despised by some and deplored by many.'⁶⁰ Hoggart continued this tradition by describing the paperback as a kind of junk literature, hidden amid the rubbish sold at railway bookstalls, 'usually in a corner, all together, lying beneath the card of aspirins and the styptic pencils'.⁶¹ Paperbacks still carry the stigma of cheap 'mass' literature, although to a far lesser extent. It is significant, for example, that Ian Chapman, publishing director of Pan Macmillan felt it necessary in 1993 to write, 'As far as paperback publishing is concerned it is easy to take a sceptical and haughty attitude towards it when one first approaches it. Paperbacks are for beaches and planes; not really to be taken seriously,' and defend paperback publishing by having to argue that, 'nothing could be further from the truth'.⁶²

Sutherland's argument that there is no clear difference between a 1989 World's Classic edition of *Middlemarch* purchased from, 'a stack at the

campus bookstore,' and an 1887 Blackwood Cabinet edition of *Middlemarch* is therefore slightly misleading. Format is the basis for substantial and complex notions concerning literary valuation. Furthermore, changes in format can be seen to have connections with and repercussions on a whole range of areas within literary production and consumption. An initiative in 1992 by Dan Franklin, then publisher of Secker and Warburg, uncovers some of these relationships.

Paperback Originals: Renegotiating Literary Values

In March 1992, Franklin announced that Secker and Warburg would be publishing, 'four works of fiction - two novels and two collection of stories - straight into paperback.'⁶³ With regard to the paperback, Worpole, comments that it has, 'become the most popular and common form of publishing,' and further, that the 'Penguin Revolution' 'has settled down into new routines of form and processes and generated new orthodoxies.'⁶⁴ Notable among these orthodoxies is the arrangement whereby new fiction titles, particularly new literary fiction titles, are usually launched first in hardback and then released, after a varying period, in paperback. Yet, Franklin's decision to publish a selection of new fiction straight into paperback caused considerable, and for him surprising, media interest. His decision blossomed into a debate about the 'death of the hardback'. Franklin displays his irritation about the inaccuracy of this debate:

In general the media hailed this development as revolutionary, presaging the death of the hardback as a viable format for a book in Britain in the 1990s. This was, of course nonsense. The paperback original was hardly a novelty. ⁶⁵

Franklin is candid about the basis for Secker and Warburg's experiment, 'publishing fiction by new, or relatively new authors in hardback at a price of £13.99 or £14.99, no longer made sense.'⁶⁶ He adds that, in his experience, hardback literary fiction has become unprofitable. Furthermore, he describes the careful preparation before the experiment. The relevant authors (or guinea pigs, as he calls them) were informed, Waterstones the

booksellers were consulted, a special overall design was commissioned for the series, and a target readership was identified. Franklin also admits his anxieties about the whole project, despite such thorough and judicious planning.

Two outstanding questions are posed by Franklin's article. Firstly, why did Secker and Warburg's experiment attract such attention from the media if, as he contends, paperback originals were 'hardly a novelty'? Secondly, why was Franklin so concerned about the project's success, especially given the amount of careful preparation and planning? The answers to both questions reveal a great deal about the contemporary literary marketplace.

As he points out, Secker and Warburg is perceived, and sees itself, as a quality 'literary publisher.' Franklin stresses to readers, for example, that the company is, 'committed to publishing new writers,' of 'quality' fiction, and launching writers on, 'significant careers'.⁶⁷ Using the phrase significant, rather than for example profitable, emphasises that Secker and Warburg see their role as helping to establish writers. Throughout his article Franklin is at pains to suggest that Secker and Warburg faced a financial problem with hardback profitability which prevented them from realising their nobler cultural aims. Producing profits is seen as a problem, rather than central objective of the company.

This friction between the financial imperative of Secker and Warburg as a commercial entity, and Secker and Warburg as a cultural institution, is underlined when Franklin describes something which is essential to understanding the current organisation of British publishing. Franklin comments: 'Chatto, Hamish Hamilton and Secker are each part of a vast publishing conglomerate. Vast publishing conglomerates tend to have an unhealthy (for editors) interest in the bottom line.'⁶⁸

Milner, Worpole, Williams, and Willison all draw attention to the relatively recent phase of conglomeration within British publishing.⁶⁹ During 1993 Secker and Warburg were part of Reed International, a multinational publishing conglomerate, in 1997 they became part of Random House -

another massive publishing conglomerate. Franklin's comment about the structural position of Secker and Warburg indicates how the experiment with paperback originals sprang, at least in part, from financial pressures exerted by Reed International at that time.

This, in turn relates to his anxieties about the list. Paperback originals might not be a new concept within publishing but what attracted such media interest, and necessitated such careful preparation, was the fact that Secker, a 'quality' literary publisher, was publishing directly into paperback and thereby adopting a key practice of 'mass' publishers. In the process, Secker and Warburg were risking their own status as a 'quality' publisher in the eyes of the British literary establishment and concomitantly needed to help organise a shift in a whole range of literary values based around market divisions, format, reviewing, and the role of literary publishing.

One central 'orthodoxy' spawned by the rise of paperback publishing, is that it is separate from hardback, or simply, 'quality' publishing.⁷⁰ This distinction has been reinforced by internal market arrangements and on the highstreet. As Feather points out, this separation has fostered different practices within paperback publishing and created what is effectively a sub-industry within publishing as a whole. Chapman argues that this has helped to reinforce and reproduce the perception, both among consumers and within publishing, that paperbacks are the format for insubstantial and rather low-quality fiction: the commercial pap churned out in vast quantities by what Worpole calls 'the bestseller industry.'⁷¹

Paperback originals, as promoted by Secker and Warburg, attempt to overcome this potential danger for their foray into paperback publishing. Use of the term original is, for example, designed to signify uniqueness and quality in the mind of the fiction consumer and differentiate Secker and Warburg's range from normal paperbacks with their connotations of mass-production. 'Original' also underlines the sales message behind the series: for a few pounds more than normal paperbacks, readers are able to read innovative literary fiction by new writers. The status of Secker and Warburg as a known 'literary' publisher therefore underwrites the special

status of their paperback originals, and this marketing reinvention of the 'original' paperback was a bold move by the company when seen in the light of one trend within contemporary British publishing.

During the late 1970s Penguin took the strategic decision to upgrade the format of the paperbacks it published. They were changed from the A (180mm x 110mm) format to the larger B format (196mm x 129mm).⁷¹ This was intended to create a more 'upmarket image' for all Penguin's fiction ranges and provided a cynical opportunity to raise prices. Other publishers swiftly followed suit. Indeed, it was so successful as a marketing strategy that by 1993 Strauss, in an article on format, reported: 'It is as if the B format has now established itself so successfully that it can assume a classic status in publishers' and consumers' eyes.'⁷² But this shift, as Strauss points out, fed through unevenly into literary publishing and the literary fiction market. Perceptively, he notes a tendency for Booker Prize winning novels to be in an even larger version of hardback or 'C' highbrow format, the royal 234mm x 153 version, rather than standard demy 216 x 135 norm. Strauss adds, that '...the Booker winners of the decade, were splendid-looking books. They also looked and felt like "big books", novels that stood out from the crowd, demanded to be taken notice of, and occupied a large position on the fiction tables of bookshops.'⁷³

Secker and Warburg's experiment with publishing directly into paperback was designed to overcome these perceptions. To succeed the company felt that it had to persuade literary critics to change one of their central practices as regards reviewing books in the format. Franklin comments: 'At the beginning of the paperback original experiment there was considerable anxiety that the literary editors of the major newspapers would ignore these titles because they were in paperback, or review them with the mass paperbacks - that is to say, perfunctorily at best.'⁷⁴

Worpole argues that this aspect of critical practice is one of the key ways through which a subtle, yet obstinate, 'economic censorship' is imposed. By reviewing only the more expensive hardback fiction, he argues, literary critics and reviewers have persistently reinforced the view that popular

'mass' fiction does not count as literature.⁷⁵ He also implies that by ignoring popular fiction and popular publishing, literary critics and reviewers are also ignoring the large readerships which popular fiction attracts.⁷⁶ Worpole therefore points to a stubborn silence, rather than outright contempt, as the main way in which the reviewing literary establishment discloses its collective opinion that while hardback literary fiction is potentially worthy of critical scrutiny, popular paperback fiction is not even worth consideration because it is mass produced cultural dross. This is supported and amplified by the critical reception given to *The Wasp Factory* and which was outlined in Chapter Two. What was noticeable, for example, was the way in which the popular dimensions of novels by Banks created ideological problems for critics who were otherwise keen to credit his novels with a measure of literary status. This prejudice did not surface during Secker and Warburg's experiment with paperbacks: the pilot series was well-reviewed.⁷⁷ Franklin is not explicit about how Secker and Warburg managed to overcome this potential danger, but there are some clues.

Secker and Warburg keenly emphasised the 'special' and limited nature of their experiment, and critics were therefore assured that the company was not about to move into mass-market fiction publishing. In addition, the whole trial with paperback originals had created such media interest that critics and reviewers seemed to want to make an exception to their usual practice and review these books. Franklin comments: 'The first four books undoubtedly benefited from the media excitement.'⁷⁸ Finally, and most important, is the role of what, provisionally, I call 'literary networks'. These are personal and professional relationships which stretch across the publishing, bookselling, and reviewing establishments. It is likely, although it would be difficult to prove, that 'word' had got to critics and reviewers to the effect that they might wish to review the fiction featured in Secker's experiment. From my research, such word-of-mouth networks are important in publishing, bookselling and the reviewing establishment.

Todd, for example, draws attention to secretive attitudes within publishing and bookselling and is candid that much of his research was obtained by conversations with 'insiders' who, in turn, converse with friends, or

colleagues in other areas of the book trade.⁷⁹ Baverstock is slightly critical of the cabalistic and introspective attitudes which she identifies in publishing. She argues: 'Appointments from outside the industry are few. There have been experiments but they are remarkable rather than usual.'⁸⁰ Evidence of these networks, as well as insight into how they operate, is central to Franklin's account of the genesis of Secker and Warburg's experiment. He writes: 'The germ of what eventually became the Secker paperback originals was 'a conversation I had - ironically in a branch of Dillons - with several senior managers from Waterstones's head office in the late summer of 1991.' He continues:

When I bemoaned the lamentable sales of a very well-reviewed first novel, I was informed that I should have published it straight into paperback. Priced at £13.99 it didn't stand a chance.... 'Suppose I did publish such books straight into paperback?' I asked. 'Would Waterstones support us?' The response was affirmative and enthusiastic.⁸¹

In Chapter Two I argued, via reference to arguments by Orwell and Gramsci, that there was evidence of structural connections between publishers and the reviewing establishment. Evidence of 'literary networks' adds a finer, more detailed, dimension to my argument. It is also supported by other accounts. Willison, for example, underlines how an entrepreneurial ethos within publishing interacted, in creative ways, with an environment of increasing cultural competition fragmentation and plurality since 1914.⁸² An effective analysis of these changes needs to take account of the way in which key individuals acted as bearers of this entrepreneurial ethos, while also understanding that their actions can be analysed in terms of wider structural processes and pressures. Secker and Warburg's experiment with paperback originals captures this interaction.

It also underlines the sharp financial pressures which are currently operating upon contemporary publishers, and the way in which these pressures can force notions of literary value into a compromise with financial viability. Secker and Warburg's experiment with paperback

originals, it appears, had a large role in decisively changing the attitude of critics' towards reviewing paperback fiction. Strauss comments: 'Previously ghettoised by the literary media, these paperbacks are now supplanting some hardcovers to occupy extensive column inches on the book review pages.'⁸³ He notes perceptively that the award of the Whitbread Prize in 1992 to Jeff Torrington's *Swing Hammer Swing!* was the turning point when critics finally, if reluctantly, abandoned their refusal to review paperback fiction.⁸⁴ *Swing Hammer Swing!* as Franklin notes with some pride, was among the initial batch of first novels chosen for Secker and Warburg's paperback experiment, and he also argues that the success of the experiment has finally convinced other literary hardback publishers to abandon their prejudice towards the paperback.⁸⁵

On a most general level, analysis of Secker and Warburg's paperback experiment discloses that financial considerations dominate contemporary publishing and that long-cherished notions of cultural value are currently secondary. Other writers have also observed this shift in priorities and it has, predictably, led to pessimistic predictions about the disappearance of quality publishing and the triumph of mass-market corporate publishing.⁸⁶ Such claims can be seen as more specific examples of the pessimistic, if not apocalyptic, strain within debates within cultural evaluation. As I have maintained throughout, these arguments simply prevent proper investigation of fundamental questions such as how this reinvigorated economic rationality is affecting contemporary British literary culture.

Willison sets the current corporatization of publishing in a wider historical context, arguing that the recent phase of structural reorganisation 'might prove to be more significant than any other innovation within publishing since 1914; including the paperback revolution.'⁸⁷ Milner, suggests that the 'economic prerogative' currently dominating British publishing might, in the long term, prove to be more influential than any residual notions of the publisher as an agent for national culture.⁸⁸ But Milner also qualifies the recent spate of mergers and takeovers within publishing and argues that the industry had a period of substantial, though less comprehensive, corporatization during the 1960s. He further argues that: 'The most

significant shift under post-war late capitalism has been that from national publishing empires to international media conglomerates.⁸⁹ Milner's point suggests that any changes in the balance between culture and profit have been part of a longer process. This implies that pessimistic predictions about the triumph of financial considerations over and above concerns about quality and diversity, are overstated. Raymond Williams provides an important account of how this tension has developed in the contemporary period. He also identifies the wider social resonances of this contradiction and his analysis can help to connect some key areas within my thesis.

In *Culture*, Williams, like Willison underlines how the dynamism of the cultural market during the latter half of this century has 'radically questioned the continuity of an otherwise persistent national culture.'⁹⁰ He proposes that the perceived contradiction between profit and notions of culture, flow from what he describes as an asymmetry between 'the purposes of cultural production and the more general social and cultural reproduction.'⁹¹ The last half of the sentence is significant because it discloses the way in which Williams gives a social dimension to asymmetries. Reproduction, as he stresses, should not be 'pushed too hard' as a concept during cultural analysis because it might lead to a mechanistic and over-simplified understanding of processes which have, 'relative autonomy' and which are subject to constant change.⁹² After this caution, he suggests that reproduction can be used to describe the way in which dominant cultural values and ideologies are reproduced by dominant classes and their institutions. Williams's thinking owes much to Gramsci and this is particularly noticeable in *Culture*.

Culture goes on to propose three areas in which significant asymmetries can be identified: the organisation of the cultural market, the organisation of censorship in relation to popular culture, and the relationship between popular culture and between 'the new forms of standardised and increasingly centralised production and reproduction.'⁹³ The thesis offered by Williams, and amplified by Milner,⁹⁴ is that a period which has seen the increasing predominance of capitalist rationality within publishing, as well as other areas of cultural production, will lead to friction with dominant

bourgeois literary culture. Furthermore, both writers propose that these tensions are a microcosm of wider cultural stresses arising from the way in which a dominant commercial ethos conflicts with socially rooted notions of cultural authority and literary value.

This interpretation can shed light on important sections of my study. In what follows I propose to show how it can help to re-evaluate the 1994 Booker; debate; analyse a commercial promotion which includes *The Wasp Factory*; and interpret information about *The Wasp Factory*'s genesis. In the Conclusion to my thesis I shall also draw on Williams's theoretical model to support my considered opinion about the basis of contemporary debates over cultural evaluation.

Secker and Warburg: A Nursery for Prestige

In Chapter Three I established that there was an agreement between conservative sections of the reviewing establishment and the commercial interests of publishers and booksellers as regards the 1994 Booker Prize. Both groups were displeased at the success of *How Late It Was How Late*, albeit for entirely different reasons. Following Williams's model, the 1994 Booker Prize then can be seen as a moment where the commercial needs of publishers and the ideological interests of conservative critics became symmetrical: profit and principle, ideology and commerce, came into harmony. As Todd notes, publishers initially nominate up to three of their authors for Booker candidacy.

A simple 'economic' interpretation might argue that Secker and Warburg promoted Kelman's novel for partisan reasons: it raised their public profile whatever the outcome, and if Kelman received the Booker then the company could claim credit publicly and cash in on any increased sales. While this is partly true, I believe that a more subtle and powerful interpretation is disclosed by applying the concept of asymmetry as set out by Williams and by examination of recent changes within the structure of publishing.

A draft of 'advance information' about *How Late It Was, How Late* which I received from Secker's publicity department in February 1994 substantiates this. The draft is largely a commercial document which is aimed at booksellers and the literary media. After technical information about the hardback edition of *How Late It Was, How Late*, the document contains a list of sales points. These are:

The eagerly awaited new novel from Booker-shortlisted author Kelman.

A talent so huge in today's terms that one is tempted to mention Zola and Beckett.

Independent

Kelman's last novel, *A Disaffection*, was shortlisted for the 1989 Booker Prize and won the James Tait Black Award.

Massive review and feature coverage guaranteed.

Stunning point of sale material to include dumpbin and poster.

The final point is clearly aimed at booksellers. 'Point of sale material' is simply marketing language for a 'sales message where goods are sold.'⁹⁵ 'Dumpbins' are the main vehicle for 'point of sale' promotions: free-standing cardboard bookcases, usually decorated with graphics from the newly-published novel's cover design.

What is significant about the draft is the extent to which it emphasises the literary accreditation of Kelman by references to his candidacy for literary prizes. References to the Booker Prize form two of the five, sales points. This bears out Todd when he argues that literary prizes, such as the Booker, have been increasingly prominent in British literary culture since 1979.⁹⁶ In the draft, Kelman's reputation and his writings are defined for booksellers and the literary media by reference to the Booker, as well as the James Tait Black Award. Culture and commerce can be seen to intertwine within the framework of these awards.

Secker and Warburg's marketing slant also promotes their identity as a publisher of culturally recognised, up-market, fiction, the kind of fiction which is compared with Emile Zola and Samuel Beckett by literary critics,

and nominated for important awards such as the Booker Prize. Other evidence also supports this interpretation. Franklin, is explicit about the company's self-appointed role as a nursery for serious, literary fiction: 'We are committed to publishing new writers,' he explains.⁹⁷ As I set out earlier in this chapter, Secker and Warburg's planning for their 'paperback originals' experiment was informed by an anxiety to keep this up-market image and differentiate the company from more overtly 'commercial' publishers.

In this sense, Secker and Warburg could be described as a publisher which is concerned with symbolic production, with producing literary prestige, reproducing norms of literary valuation, publishing writings which are seen to possess quality and which are perceived as innovative. Bourdieu, who has parallels with Williams, describes this symbolic currency as 'cultural capital.'⁹⁸ According to him, cultural capital describes a symbolic form of accreditation which can in time, and given the right conditions, be transformed into financial capital.⁹⁹ Bourdieu's theories are complex and have created widespread controversy, not least because of their 'deromanticised'¹⁰⁰ account of the class basis of literary production and consumption.¹⁰¹

Nevertheless, Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital has some purchase here given current developments within cultural industries and the cultural economy. Mc Guigan, for example, argues that the current volatile state of consumer capitalism means that the extra (or added) value which marketing, advertising and design can create around products has become increasingly important in an increasingly saturated marketplace:

With accelerated rates of capital accumulation and volatility of tastes, the value-addedness of design, research and development, supported by marketing, provides a competitive advantage in the marketplace.¹⁰²

In this environment there is an economic advantage to be gained in persuading the ever more sophisticated (western) consumer that the product they are buying confers, following the logic of *Distinctions*, some

special social status.

Following research by Simon Frith,¹⁰³ and an approach initially developed at the Lancaster School of Sociology, McGuigan gives a further twist to this perspective when he suggests that an important recent trend within cultural industries is their 'vertical disintegration avant la lettre'.¹⁰⁴ According to McGuigan this involves increasing autonomy for smaller, less market-orientated, sectors of cultural production and refers to their role as areas of market-research and development for mainstream mass-market sectors of cultural production.¹⁰⁵ These semi-autonomous sectors produce the innovations and diversity periodically necessary to reinvigorate the mainstream market. Willison notes a similar relationship between modernist publishers and mainstream publishing during the 1930s,¹⁰⁶ and Secker and Warburg's position during 1994 as a 'quality publisher' within the corporate economy of Reed-Elsevier, conforms to this model.

In an article on the role of the editor, Franklin describes this strategy of long-term investment in cultural capital. There are also implicit criticisms of the short-term commercialism prevalent in contemporary publishing. Franklin comments, 'The publishing business - in deep financial trouble at the peak of the recession - is looking increasingly towards the short term for a quick return on capital.'¹⁰⁷ Franklin cites the recent structural changes within publishing and bookselling as a basis for this conflict between harsh commercialism and the ideological commitment by editors to longer-term investment in quality and diversity. This short-termism is, according to his account, contrary to what most editors want and he defends the 'old ways and old standards' of editors. Franklin argues: 'To most editors the 'small' book matters as much as the 'big' book. Their satisfaction lies in 'growing' authors, supporting them for three or four profitable books and then reaping the benefits when the fifth is a success.' ¹⁰⁸

Franklin's analysis of the 'old standards' of editors versus the short-term requirements of the corporate economy recasts the fundamental asymmetry which I have identified within the modern history of publishing. It sets this conflict in a contemporary context and, in light of recent changes, within the

structure, practices, and ethos of publishing and bookselling.

This is the origin of the asymmetry which can be detected at the 1994 Booker Prize. Crucially, Franklin was the firm's publisher during the 1993/1994 period when *How Late it Was, How Late* was nominated by Secker and Warburg for the 1994 Booker Prize. His approach in favour of increased longer-term 'cultural' investment by publishers can be seen to connect with the company's decision to endorse Kelman's novel and career more generally. Under Franklin, this 'quality publisher' endorsed Kelman in their bid to help generate the literary reputation necessary for the production of cultural capital. Unfortunately, after the success of *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* at the 1993 Booker Prize and a prolonged economic recession, other publishers and booksellers wanted an immediate financial success rather than any investment in longer-term market development. Ironically, the short-termist tendencies which Franklin identifies within contemporary publishing affected one of Secker and Warburg's most prominent authors.

My Generation: Promoting the Literary Alternative

In this chapter I have argued that it is important to perceive publishers and booksellers as crucial actors in the formation, or development, of forms of literary valuation and evaluation. This approach is pertinent to Banks's development as a writer. Todd, argues that:

Today's serious literary novelists in Britain, however, unlike those of sixty to seventy years ago, are alive to commercial possibilities that for most of the twentieth-century have been available only to writers deliberately aiming at the best-selling, genre-fiction end of the market such as crime or science fiction.¹⁰⁹

Such historical comparisons would require detailed research to back them up and Todd does not include any such studies in his account. But this argument does resonate with comments which Banks has made about the

origin of *The Wasp Factory* and where he demonstrates a clear grasp of how literary fiction can, ironically, be more profitable than what is usually regarded as commercial generic fiction:

I was nearly thirty and hadn't had a book published so I thought I'd write something that wasn't science fiction. I had to go through a big internal battle with myself, because the hard-line part of me didn't want to give up science-fiction, sort of selling out...Whereas the pragmatist part of me was saying 'oh no, write something that's got a better chance of being published because there are just more publishers you can send mainstream stuff to'. 110

Banks adds: 'The mainstream book that resulted was *The Wasp Factory*.' He also notes: '...it wasn't quite as mainstream as I meant it to be.' Banks's autobiographical analysis discloses an inner negotiation between market values and between his own personal literary values. Consequently *The Wasp Factory*, and Banks's 'mainstream' novels in general, can be seen as the result of this rapprochement. This adds a new gloss to the eclectic generic makeup of Banks's novels because it can be attributed, at least partly, to this negotiation between their author's passion for science fiction and fantasy, and between his pragmatic realization that some mainstream, naturalistic fiction conventions were needed to secure publication.

Nevertheless, as Banks also points out, this negotiation did not quite work. *The Wasp Factory* was written more in terms of his own personal artistic objectives and I suggest that it was the idiosyncratic and unconventional narrative of *The Wasp Factory* which attracted James Hale, Banks's first editor at Macmillan, to the manuscript. Furthermore, I also suggest, in light of this chapter, that Hale's calculated gamble in promoting the manuscript for publication, and 'which he new was going to offend a lot of people',¹¹¹ was aimed to help renew Macmillan's portfolio of writers at that time and to attract a new, younger audience to their publications. This strategy, and Banks's establishment as a novelist, can be seen in light of efforts by publishers and booksellers during the 1980s to reinvigorate and renew British literary culture. It turned out to be an important personal moment for Banks too: had Hale not promoted *The Wasp Factory* at Macmillan and

managed to ensure its publication, there is evidence that Banks would have abandoned writing altogether.¹¹²

Hale's gamble turned out to be an immense financial success: unconventional was very profitable. Since 1992 alone, *The Wasp Factory* has sold around 190,000 copies.¹¹³ To develop this interpretation I turn to a commercial promotion for *The Wasp Factory*, analysis of which helps understand how publishers targeted new markets during the 1980s and continue to do so in the 1990s.

On the 21 January 1996 *The Observer* boasted an extra supplement in its Sunday edition. The supplement was called 'My Generation' and described itself as a comparative guide to: 'Radical reading in 1966 and 1996.' *The Wasp Factory* was featured as one of twenty selected 'radical reads' available for 1996. The supplement has four central elements which interconnect in significant ways. First, an article by the writer Will Self in which he examines the definition of a 'cult book' and the processes behind a text acquiring 'its cultish penumbra.' In other words, an interpretive framework is provided for readers by an authoritative figure. Second, brief reviews of forty cult books, twenty of which were had cult status in 1966, and twenty considered to have cult followings in 1996. This acts as a generic canon - a number of texts which are defined as cult texts. Third, comparative sketches of the British cultural 'scene' in 1966 and in 1996. Fourth, a commercial promotion by Waterstones which brashly proclaims: 'Buy two books and get a third free!' The promotion enthuses:

At Waterstones from 15 January until 14 February 1996 we are offering the chance for cyberpunks to leap back in time to sample the literary experiences of the generation that was coming of age in the mid to late 1960s. Meanwhile, anyone with a kaftan going mouldy at the back of the wardrobe can catch up with what's cool to read in the 1990s. (p. 42)

'My Generation' nicely illustrates the interconnections between different sectors of what Milner, following Anderson, calls 'print capitalism.'¹¹⁴ In an attempt to increase its market share, Guardian Newspapers bought *The*

Observer in 1993. As part of its acquisition, Guardian Newspapers promised to reinvigorate *The Observer* which had increasingly lost readers in the 'broadsheet' or quality market. This acquisition was, in turn, part of a strategy in the face of increasing concentrations in the ownership of British newspapers, exemplified by the increasing dominance of Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation which owns *The Times*, *The Sun*, *The Sunday Times* and the *News Of The World*.¹¹⁵ *The Observer's* 'Life' magazine, which comes with every Sunday issue, came out of this relaunch.

'Life' as its title suggests, promotes, and focuses on, lifestyles and this has an ironic resonance with *Complicity* because the novel, as I set out in Chapter Two, makes some scathing comments about the role of the 'quality' press. Colley is described to readers as a cynical and politicised investigative reporter. In one amusing scene Colley stumbles upon some damning evidence about how larger whisky producers are putting pressure on smaller companies producing this symbol of Scottish culture and national identity. His editor refuses to run the article:

'Are you going to print it or not?' I ask him.

'Certainly not, as it stands. This is supposed to grace the front of the Saturday supplement, Cameron; it's for hung over people in their dressing-gowns to scatter their croissant crumbs across; the way it reads at the moment you'd be lucky to get it into the back of *Private Eye*.' (p.43)

The main political point being made is that, despite best intentions among some within the press, their main role is to mediate 'what the people want' with the interests of big business and a politically corrupt capitalist state. This argument is central to the whole novel. Furthermore, this scene indicates how the press come to terms with these two potentially conflicting roles: one as the self-appointed guardians of democracy and 'the people'; the other as organs of a political and social order which is fundamentally undemocratic. Banks indicates to readers that the press reconciles these conflicting pressures, by helping to make sure that 'what the people want' is usually distraction, or at the most, a limited criticism of the economic political and social system. Further, Banks subversively implies that the

practice of ensuring readers are faced with comfortable distractions is not just the preserve of tabloid journalism, but also goes on in what is described as the 'quality' press.

After rejection, Banks subversively has Cameron's editor inform him that a series on the National Trust will take its place in the Saturday supplement (p. 44). The implication here is that quality newspapers simply include more tasteful, but equally vacuous and petty, forms of distraction as their popular tabloid counterparts. *Complicity* then, like other novels by Banks, casts a cynical eye over the relationship between different areas of cultural consumption. The novel implies that perceived divisions between popular and quality cultural consumption are false and that such divisions are simply created by the way in which cultural industries segment the market for maximum profitability. This irony is increased when another aspect of 'My Generation' is considered.

The promotion emphasises the popular cultural credentials of the texts on offer. One on the 1996 list, *Reservoir Dogs*, is a transcribed film script, and the brief description of the novel focuses on the mass-market ambitions of the text. Tom Hiney comments, 'Despite dyslexia and the fact that he wrote it in three weeks...Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* became a publishing as well as a box-office phenomenon when the screenplay was auctioned at Frankfurt's book fair' (p. 41). Publication of the screenplay of *Reservoir Dogs* is an example of the interplay, and blurring, between traditional forms of textuality such as the novel. An important point to make is that such minimally-edited film scripts, along with the more established 'book of the film', are initiated not by publisher and fiction writer but by film company and screenwriter.

Reservoir Dogs, can be seen as originating in post-print sectors of cultural production and accordingly as an example of the values of mass production. Indeed, the film versions of *Reservoir Dogs* and *Pulp Fiction*, as well as Quentin Tarantino, are criticised for being too commercial by one of the promotion's writers. Charlotte O'Sullivan writes:

But there is another, darker side to the cult movie in 1996. It

seems Hollywood has finally got hold of the idea as a whizz-bang marketing ploy; thanks to Quentin Tarantino we've all realised cult sells. *Reservoir Dogs* which came out in 1992 possibly deserved the title. *Pulp Fiction*, though hyped in the press as a cult classic, couldn't be more mainstream. (p. 41)

Comparing comments by O'Sullivan and those by Hiney emphasises a central tension which runs through 'My Generation': it is constantly having to reconcile its own status as a commercial marketing exercise with the literary-cultural claims which are made about the minority appeal of the texts on offer. One of the key ways in which the promotion attempts to defuse this tension is by criticising its own role as a mass-market advertisement for cult literature. This results in some evocative ambiguities which threaten to destabilise the integrity of the entire promotion. In his analysis of what counts as a cult book, the contemporary novelist, Will Self, questions the whole basis of 'the literary counter culture' and comments that cult could be analysed on a negative premise :

...implied by the very existence of this promotion itself. After all, in a culture in which the 'cultish' is the subject of such mass attention, can it really be said to exist at all? It often seems nowadays as if every potentially 'avant garde' book is hoiked or hyped up into popularity as quickly as you can say Jeffrey Archer. (p. 32)

Nevertheless, Self stops short of undermining the entire credibility of his account by arguing that cult status stems from 'some ability that a text has to sum up, or encapsulate, the spirit of the times' (p. 33).

One of the chief characteristics of contemporary cultural production is, as Williams argues, its restless efforts to create new markets. Recently, other accounts have also drawn attention to the active role of cultural producers in helping to foment demand for goods and services.¹¹⁶ This perspective avoids crude arguments, to the effects that either consumers are manipulated, or alternatively, that they have 'consumer sovereignty' in deciding what is popular or possesses literary merit. 'My Generation' discloses how publishers and booksellers can stimulate demand by careful

and targeted advertising.

There is evidence that *The Wasp Factory*, with Banks's other novels generally, has managed to gain a young readership. One interviewer noted that: 'Iain Banks's mainstream books are undoubtedly aimed at a younger, 20-something market,' and likened him to a 'growing youth icon.'¹¹⁷ Banks himself has done much to encourage this readership, notably by giving speeches at the Oxford Union and interviews to student newspapers. Indeed, *The Crow Road*, *Walking On Glass*, *The Bridge* and *Espedair Street* all have central characters who are recognisably 'twenty something.' An affinity between this particular age-group is chimed thematically throughout novels by Banks, as they focus on the transition from adolescence to adulthood, changing fashions in pop music, and youth fashions. Banks's 'young' readership has also been reflected in commercial literary awards.

In 1993 Banks was acknowledged as one of the 'Best Of Young British Writers' which is awarded by the Book Marketing Council for outstanding new literary fiction.¹¹⁸ It is significant, however, that the Book Marketing Council's prize is given, at least partly, on the basis of a novelist's commercial performance, and by publishers and booksellers, as opposed to wholly on literary criteria and with the co-operation of critics and reviewers. Todd suggests that the 1993 award was given, by way of compensation, for Banks's lack of success at 'serious' literary prizes like the Booker.¹¹⁹ His novels were also included in W.H. Smith's 'Fresh Talent' promotion which took place between January and February 1997. In 1993 Banks was thirty-nine and to describe him as young is therefore slightly misleading, however, the label can be seen as further confirmation that Banks writes for a young audience. Similarly the idea of 'fresh talent' can also be seen to be aimed at a young market of readers.

'My Generation', as its title suggests, is cleverly aimed at this same market. One of the most important ways in which it addresses a young readership is by 'signposting' with terms of generational reference. For example, Self casually refers to his connection with 'Radio 1' and 'the Mark Ratcliffe

show,' which was rather unsubtly italicised to stress this connection (p. 32). The point of such name-dropping is that it presumes that readers regularly listen to 'Radio 1' and enjoy its commercial popular music and youth culture packaging. Further evidence for this generational targeting can be found throughout the promotion. Comparisons between 1966 and 1996 are, for example, premised on the understanding that the promotion's young readers are unaware of the precedents for their interests in contemporary fashion and pop art. In an overview of parallels between fashion in 1966 and 1996, *The Observer's* fashion correspondent, Roger Tredre, writes:

1966 was some year for fashion. The teenagers who shopped till they dropped in the new generation of boutiques were fashion obsessives, hungry to experiment - and the designers were delighted to find such a willing market for their outre creations. (p. 39)

Tredre's analysis relies on the tacit understanding that readers were not part of this 1960s generation of youth.

One of the promotion's most important dimensions, is its attempts to persuade reader's that by possessing the texts on offer they can pursue a strategy of personal distinction. This has two aspects. As Milner, points out, and following Peter Bürger, the novel is part of a 'highly individualised system of cultural production and consumption.'¹²⁰ Novels are produced by the individual writer and consumed in their reception by 'isolated individuals.'¹²¹ The vast majority of texts on offer in 'My Generation' are novels and it is therefore perfectly in keeping with this observation that the promotion should appeal to readers on the basis of their individuality. Self, for example, proffers the view that each individual has their 'own personal canon' (p. 33).

In the second aspect of this appeal to individuality, 'My Generation' can be seen to bear out Bourdieu's concept of distinctions. As I noted earlier in this chapter, Bourdieu's analysis of class has been subject to significant criticism.¹²² Nevertheless, the value of his approach lies partly in his attempt to address the difficult question of how 'specialised consumption

develops.¹²³ In *Distinctions*, for example, Bourdieu draws attention to the way in which consumption of cultural goods is stratified via the prism of social class, and in efforts to reproduce class distinctions by ascribing cultural goods with symbolic properties.

These symbolic properties are much in evidence throughout 'My Generation'. Its advertising slant revolves around the message that by purchasing the texts it offers, their consumer becomes 'radical', 'cool', 'immersed in literary cultishness', alternative, part of a select cultural scene, and associated with other socially desirable qualities. In this sense the romantic individualism of 'My Generation', and which is disclosed by the plug that *Kitchen* by Banana Yoshimoto 'is perfect for those misty Sunday night's when life's dots don't seem to be joining up,' (p. 39) is contradicted by the harsh competitive individualism disclosed by the implication that readers gain personal advantage and social distinction by purchasing these cult texts. The opportunity for 'self-improvement' perversely coexists with the injunction to succeed in the eyes of others. 'My Generation' promotes self-improvement and social climbing as leisure activities.

This conflict within contemporary notions of individualism has not been lost on contemporary novelists, notably Banks. As I set out in Chapter Two, *Espedair Street* subversively connects this renewed promotion of individualism by advertising and marketing, with the laissez faire political ideology of Britain during the 1980s. Weir's narrative describes how the idolisation of the individual, promoted by popular music and other areas of popular culture based around capitalist organisation, connects with a British society which promotes an aggressive individualism and in which as Weir points out 'everybody looks like para-civillians; streetwise combatants in the battle for jobs,' (p. 87). In *Walking On Glass*, Park's quest for cultural kudos is satirically described as an attempt to purchase the social-cultural distinctions which Park believes are necessary to win the affections of the upper-class Ffitch. During the next chapter I extend this analysis of the relationship between social class and consumption.

Authenticity is another key motif of 'My Generation'. In the most literal

sense, Self's article on what is described as 'The Literary Counter-Culture' can be seen to act as a mechanism of quality control and assurance for readers about the authenticity of the texts on offer. But, as I suggested earlier, Self's cynicism about the commercial mass-market appeal of cult sensibility threatens to destabilise his role as a guarantor. This creates the richly paradoxical and slightly comic situation where Self is forced to admit that 'Cult can also be outrageously popular,' (p. 32). The article has other less obvious, but equally important, ways of authenticating the cult status of *The Wasp Factory* and other texts on offer, notably its promotion of nostalgia. Self, for example, comments, 'Quite a few books of 1966 were specifically putting forward alternative philosophies: feminism, existentialism, sexual liberation and most markedly mysticism. I can't as yet detect the same high-mindedness in 1996' (p. 33). Self's analysis implies that the 1960s was a golden period for cult and alternative literature. During the 1980s nostalgia was rediscovered and reinvented as a marketing ploy, particularly with respect to a mythologised vision of the 1950s.¹²⁴

The promotion markets a variant of this post-war cultural utopia. Its writers argue that the 1960s saw a cult literature and literary counter-culture which was far more dynamic and authentic than anything offered in the 1990s. This fits with the youth market targeting by the promotion, disclosed when it offers 'cyberpunks the chance to leap back in time to sample the literary experiences of the generation which was reluctantly coming of age in the mid-to-late 1960s' (p. 42). Persuading youth readers to purchase texts first published around thirty years ago requires this nostalgic re-evaluation and packaging, because they can hardly be marketed as wholly original and fresh publications by new writers. Historical authenticity comes to replace originality and the appeal of the new is inverted, becoming a quest for the authentic.

In her account of advertising and marketing within contemporary publishing and bookselling, Baverstock, comments that: 'The 25 - 44s are the key age group for book buying; they make up 36 per cent of the population but buy over half of all consumer books purchased by adults in the U.K.' ¹²⁵ 'My Generation' is an example of this demographically-targeted marketing.

Frith, presents evidence that the 1980s saw an important change in the way in which advertising and marketing perceived the youth market.¹²⁶ His thesis is that youth was re-evaluated and extended upwards in age range because marketing and advertising departments realised that consumers in the 18 to 34 age bracket had far more disposable income than the those in the 12 to 24 age bracket, who had traditionally been regarded as the youth market.¹²⁷

I argued earlier in this chapter that Banks's novels can be regarded as appealing to an undergraduate or graduate audience. For example, a survey undertaken by *The Times Higher Education* noted that novels by Banks were extremely popular among undergraduate and postgraduate students.¹²⁸ Significantly, the age range of undergraduates, graduates and postgraduates, impinges on the re-aged group identified by Frith, and also intersects, particularly graduates and postgraduates, with the lower range of the key age group identified by Baverstock.¹²⁹ In his account of Secker and Warburg's experiment with paperback originals, Franklin, also identifies this same twenty-something young audience as its key strategic target.¹³⁰ He also indicated that this young audience 'saw no kudos in owning a hardcover' and were interested in radical and contemporary fiction:

Of the first ten books, seven or eight would probably not have much appeal to the readers of Mary Wesley or Kingsley Amis. They are too raw, too violent, too contemporary, too experimental in style.¹³¹

'My Generation' addresses the same audience and its significant that it does so by emphasising that the texts on offer define some sense of alternative or oppositional literature for contemporary readers. Symbolically this is represented by 'cover assemblage' which graces the promotion's front cover. This depicts a pile of texts which are skewered by nails, screws, and a sword. Recognisably these texts are: *Catcher in The Rye* by J.D. Salinger; *Trainspotting* by Irvine Welsh; *On The Road* by Jack Kerouac; and finally *The Wasp Factory*. Visually these graphics connote deviance and radicalism, and they suggest that a thematic continuity runs through these novels, that they all define some sense of oppositional or counter-

culture literature. The further implication is that their purchase places readers within an 'alternative' lifestyle by introducing them to texts which challenge the conventional sexual, moral, and literary values of mainstream society. This is carried through into the main body of the promotion and expressed through icons which categorise texts as 'blood,' 'sex', 'weird', 'angry', 'druggy' or 'political.' The values of the counter-culture are handily identified and categorised for readers through a set of adjectives.

Self's comments about the paradoxical status of cult literature [G] in a period of mass-marketing and advertising also touch on a concern which has been central to accounts of popular culture. One of the key arguments which has run through cultural studies is that popular culture, or youth culture, expresses resistance to the values and authority of the dominant culture.¹³² In parallel, the argument has been advanced that such expressions of youthful rebellion are appropriated by the advertising and marketing departments of cultural industries and who turn rebellion into an extremely profitable advertising ploy.¹³³ This analysis applies to 'My Generation', where the texts of a literary counter-culture are packaged as as a coherent body of anti-establishment, rebellious literature to furnish an 'alternative' lifestyle for a twenty-something group of consumers eager to differentiate themselves from mainstream mass-consumption.

Ironically, 'My Generation' calls on prominent, extremely commercial mass-marketing devices to promote this consumer strategy based around difference and authenticity. It also promotes this 'niche' literature under the auspices of a chain bookstore and mainstream national newspaper. As I set out earlier in this chapter, Williams argues that the relationship between popular culture and reproduced commercial versions of popular culture is a significant source of friction and paradox, primarily, Williams argues, because standardisation, regulation, and centralisation, are inimical to the dynamism and creativity which characterise popular cultures.¹³⁴

The results of this conflict are asymmetries, and these can be seen to surface in 'My Generation' through Self's ironic emphasis on the commercial pedigree of cult literature, as well as in light of how *Espedair*

Street and other novels by Banks such as *Walking On Glass* subversively satirise the commercial manipulation contained in promotions like 'My Generation'. In this sense, including *The Wasp Factory* in the cult list, rather than *Walking On Glass* or *Espedair Street*, can be seen, ironically, as the least radical choice.

Endnotes

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- 5 Tim Waterstone, 'The Other Side: Bookselling In Britain and The United States', *Publishing Now*, p. 102.
- 6 Bradbury, p. 403.
- 7 Todd, p. 127.
- 8 Milner, p. 99.
- 9 Ian Paten, 'Literary Publishing Within A Conglomerate', *Publishing Now*, p. 31.
- 10 For an outline of this problem see: Peter Curwen, *The U.K. Publishing Industry* (Oxford: Pergaman Press, 1981), pp. 5 - 8.
- 11 Baverstock, p. 104.
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 - 13 Baverstock, pp. 81 - 87.
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- 18 Sutherland, 'Production', p. 816.
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- 24 Storey, *Cultural*, p. 97, original italics.
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- 33 Worpole, p. 15.
 - 34 Willison, p. 107.
 - 35 Willison, p. 107.
 - 36 Willison, p. 120.
 - 37 *Culture Shock*, Iain Banks Webzine, 1997: p. 20.
 - 38 John Gross, *The Rise and Fall Of The Man Of Letters*, revised 2nd ed. (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 334.
 - 39 Worpole, p. 26.
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 - 41 Feather, p. vii.
 - 42 *Culture*, p. 11.
 - 43 Willison, p. 121.
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 - 48 Baverstock, p. 81.
 - 49 Michael S. Howard, *Jonathan Cape, Publisher* (Harmonsworth: Penguin, 1977), p. 254.
 - 50 John L. Young, *Books from The Ms. To The Bookseller* (London: Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons, 1929), p. 9.
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- 66 Franklin, 'Hardback', p. 23.
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- 70 Worpole, p. 23.
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- 72 Peter Strauss, 'Format', *Publishing Now*, p. 57.
- 73 Peter Strauss, 'Format', *Publishing Now*, p. 57.
- 74 Franklin, 'Hardback', p. 24.
- 75 Worpole, p. 89.
- 76 Worpole, p. 89.
- 77 Franklin, 'Hardback', p. 25.
- 78 Franklin, 'Hardback', p. 25.
- 79 Todd, p. 11.
- 80 Baverstock, p. 141.
- 81 Franklin, 'Hardback', p. 24.
- 82 Willison, p. 121.
- 83 Peter Strauss, 'Format', *Publishing Now*, p. 61.
- 84 Peter Strauss, 'Format', *Publishing Now*, p. 61. Shrewdly, Strauss notes that *Swing Hammer, Swing!* was only reviewed after it had received The Whitbread Prize. Interestingly, Torrington and Kelman are also friends and the reprinted 1992 Secker and Warburg paperback edition of *Swing Hammer Swing!* carries an endorsement by Kelman on its front cover: 'I've known Jeff Torrington for years now, in fact he's a close friend: but that does not stop me from saying that *Swing Hammer Swing!* is a great novel - and being a friend that makes me proud.'
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- 86 Birkets, p. 190.
- 87 Willison, p. 121.
- 88 Milner, p. 102.
- 89 Milner, p. 100.
- 90 *Culture*, p. 234.
- 91 *Culture*, p. 98.
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- 94 Milner, 102.
- 95 Baverstock, p. 37.
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- 102 McGuigan, p. 89.
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- 120 Milner, p. 96.
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- 122 See Nicholas Garnham, 'The Cultural Arbitrary and Television', *Bourdieu Critical Perspectives*, eds. C. Calhoun, E. Li Puma and Moshe Postone (Oxford: Polity Press, 1993), pp. 180 -181.
- 123 Scott Lash, 'Pierre Bourdieu: Cultural Economy and Social Change', *Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives*, eds. C. Calhoun, E. Li Puma and Moshe Postone (Oxford: Polity Press, 1993), p. 206.
- 124 Celia Lury, *Consumer Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), pp. 193 - 194.
- 125 Baverstock, pp. 114 -115.
- 126 Simon Frith, 'Youth/music/television' *Sound and Vision: The Music Video Reader* eds. L. Grossberg, S. Frith and A. Goodwin (London/New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 67.
- 127 Ibid.
- 128 *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 30 May 1997.
- 129 Baverstock, pp. 114 - 115.
- 130 Franklin, 'Hardback', p. 28.
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- 132 Storey, *Cultural*, pp. 117 - 123.
- 133 Featherstone, p. 35.
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Chapter 5

The Values of Bourgeois Culture? Class and Contemporary Novels

Introduction

The relationship between class and culture has been the subject of enormous and enduring interest by both novelists as well as academics. Speaking in 1940 Orwell expressed his doubts that 'proletarian literature' could be anything but a literature of revolt. He argues that such literature can have only a limited oppositional role. Orwell sees two reasons why proletarian literature cannot escape being marginalised. Firstly he believes that English society is seeing a blurring of class divisions. 'I believe,' he comments 'that the class distinctions in a country like England are now so unreal that they cannot last much longer.'¹ Secondly, Orwell asserts the general theoretical proposition that the dominant literary form corresponds to the dominant class in any period. He argues, 'so long as the bourgeoisie are the dominant class, literature must be bourgeois.' He also further defines this argument, saying: 'by "bourgeois" and "bourgeoisie" I don't mean mean merely the people who buy and sell things. I mean the whole dominant culture of our time.'² As Spencer makes clear, class has continued to fascinate English writers, and poets such as Tony Harrison have perceived class as central to their writings, both stylistically, and in a wider political sense.³

Indeed the 1980s saw a growth in relative social inequality and was presided over in Britain by a state which seemed determined to increase material divisions between social strata. What some have aptly called a strategy of 'social inequality', ironically, was in full swing during the decade in which Orwell's novel, *1984* was set and while it might not be proper to equate class with income, it is striking how those at the lower end of Britain's social system also suffered most during this period.⁴ In addition, despite attempts by some sociologists to argue that cultural distinctions between classes had disappeared in the post-war period, other studies

pointed to the continued existence of a working-class culture.⁵

Orwell's argument that the dominant culture is going to be the culture of the dominant class has a far greater and long-lasting significance than his prophecy that class distinctions were untenable. It underwrites the approach of Williams, Milner, Hoggart, and other accounts which have figured strongly in my thesis so far. It is also central, as I have argued throughout, to the novels by Banks and Kelman. An examination of class therefore can be seen to be germane to my consideration of novels by both authors, as well as cultural production generally.

Nevertheless, social class represents enormous practical problems for an analysis of contemporary literary production. One key difficulty lies in the quantity of approaches which are currently available. Class analysis could be used to identify the social origin of contemporary novelists; the social origin of publishers and publishing staff; the general bourgeois domination which Orwell describes; the social origin of critics and reviewers, or that of readers. Each of these different approaches could be used to ask or address a specific question, respectively: how the social class of contemporary novelists affects their writings; how the class origins of editors predisposes them towards particular types of novels and hence recommending these for publication; how literary culture is generally suffused by the values and attitudes of the bourgeoisie; whether critics enforce a class-based ideology via their reviews; if readers make sense of a novel such as *A Disaffection* by reference to their own social class. Another central, though more basic, difficulty resides in defining class. This can have damaging consequences for any cultural study which invokes the concept. Billington et al. identify four tendencies:

First, there is a general failure to conceptualise and define class. 'The fact is,' Billington et al. comment: 'that in many of the studies on class and culture the notion of class is itself problematic.'⁶ Second, Billington et al. note a failure to distinguish analytically 'the dominant culture' from that of the middle class. They comment: 'There is a tendency in the literature on culture and class to conflate the category of the dominant culture with that of

the middle class, rather than for example use the category of the bourgeoisie.⁷ Third, Billington et al. contend that problems with defining class are bound up with problems in defining popular culture and high culture.⁸ Fourth, that: 'Class fractions and differentiation within classes ...would seem to point towards a complexity and duality of cultures and subcultures' which 'does not accord with the limited notion of class used in most studies of class and class culture to date.'⁹ In particular, Billington et al. point to sociological debates about the coherence of the bourgeoisie in the period since the 1950s, and to arguments that this period has seen the appearance of a new faction within the bourgeoisie, related to changes within capitalist societies.¹⁰

In response to these problems Billington et al. urge that 'An attempt must be made to reconcile the dimensions of culture as a *structure* that individuals are born into and culture as a *process* which they create and recreate.' And add: 'We need to analyse the ways in which culture is an area of resistance, negotiation and incorporation, some of which may involve class consciousness and action.'¹¹ These are all good, perceptive points. But they are very general guidelines for any methodology which looks at class in contemporary novels. I propose that there are two ways of looking at class in relation to novels by Kelman and Banks.

First by relating their representations of social class to sociological debates about the growth of the 'underclass'; the decline of the working-class and its fragmentation; changes within the British middle-class; and the disappearance of class altogether as a significant way of understanding social structure. Second, through reference to the social class of the British reading public. I do so by examination of data from Book Marketing Limited and by briefly referring to accounts which argue that the social class of contemporary readers is significant. This is the substance of Appendix A, which is designed to complement my examination of class in this chapter, as well as providing a cross-reference for the second half of Chapter Four, but it also stands as an autonomous element of this study.

I believe that both these approaches have a degree of originality and

further that they are productive, aiding study of novels by Banks and Kelman as well as of their contemporaries. These arguments are developed within my overall Conclusion.

A Country Full Of The Wrong Sort Of People: Kelman, Banks and Current Debates About Class

Amin, comments: 'These appear to be times of bewildering transformation and change in the structure and organisation of western economy and society.'¹² This feeling of bewilderment and powerlessness is intense in Kelman's novels and many of their characters are shown to be near some form of mental or emotional breakdown. Kelman implies that these psychological instabilities are caused, at least in part, by the economic insecurities which blight increasingly fragmented working-class communities. In the short story, 'No longer The Warehouseman', for example the unnamed narrator describes his predicament in grammatically correct, but fractured sentences. He begins: 'What matters most is that I can no longer take gainful employment.' This overly formal tone ('I can no longer take gainful employment') seems simply odd, until the narrator indicates that his unemployment is leading to a personal crisis:

I do not like the social security. Also, one has difficulty with the money they provide.

And I must I must. Or else find a new job of work. But after this morning one feels one...well, one feels that there is something wrong with one. (p. 142)

This is percipient. One persistent effect of long-term unemployment in this country is the extent to which it destroys the esteem, self-confidence and health of its victims. Not surprisingly it is also the case that there appears to be a link between long-term unemployment and mental illness.¹³ Novels by Kelman and Banks also describe increasing pressures on those in work - those who, unlike Sammy, have a productive role in the capitalist

economy.¹⁴ In 'Events In Yer Life', the omniscient narrator, describes the central character's aimless and bewildered psyche in terms of more widespread pressures:

People are under pressure. Ye never know what's going on,
what's under the surface. Derek slept with this women a coupla
years ago and one night she burst out crying. For no reason.
Just life. (p. 220)

Such arguments can also be found Banks's novels. In *Complicity*, Colley's addiction to amphetamines is a an apt reflection of his manic work-centered lifestyle. In the novel Colley is consequently shown to have a shrivelled personal life, which consists largely of game-playing in virtual computer generated fantasy worlds or having unsatisfactory sexual affairs. Banks therefore argues that career success in contemporary Britain usually comes with emotional alienation. The result, as Banks underlines in *Complicity* and *The Bridge*, is the growth of irrationalism, emotional alienation, cynicism, drug-abuse, and narcissism, all presided over by a society which ruthlessly promotes a spiritually void, but attractive, consumer ethic. Banks emphasises how an all-pervasive capitalism poisons wider social and cultural relationships because it increasingly favours emotionally-stunted and self-centered individuals. The key word here is 'increasingly' because novels like *Complicity* and *The Bridge* indicate that the social pressures to achieve 'the good life' of material and career success have a more intense quality than earlier historical periods.

In *The Bridge*, Banks indicates one of the reasons why this is so. The narrative describes Lennox's childhood in the late 1960s and the way in which the dominant society taught him to become 'a little ashamed' of his working-class father and working-class family background:

He liked his dad, until he became a little ashamed of him, as he became a little ashamed of all his family. His father lived for football and payday; he had all the old records by Harry Lauder and of several pipe bands, and he could recite about fifty Burns poems by heart. He was a Labour man, of course,... (P. 102)

Disclosed here is the implication that working-class culture and values are marginalised by the dominant consumer, or bourgeois, culture which is been promoted at every turn by contemporary British society. Like Weir in *Espedair Street*, Lennox manages to have the 'good life' which is promoted by this consumer culture, but like Weir, he finds its contents spiritually bereft and emotionally unsatisfactory. Banks therefore indicates that by rejecting the class culture of his background he also rejects part of his personal identity, and when Lennox turns to drugs, alcohol, and fast cars by way of compensation, the didactic core of *The Bridge* is revealed for readers.

The argument that capitalist rationality is increasingly dominating people's social or psychological identities, and thereby causing a crisis, can also be found in recent academic accounts. [G] Fairclough, for example, notes how the language of the market has recently been extended to areas of social and personal life which were previously seen as private. He comments, 'People's social identities... are coming to be defined in terms that have been traditionally seen not as occupational, but as belonging to the sphere of private life.'¹⁵ This creates the concomitant question of what kind of social identity is left for those who cannot, or will not, participate in a system which defines citizenship in terms of consumer or worker.

Novels by both writers also offer themselves as a site of resistance to the politics of what might be called authoritarian populism. I argued earlier that *The Wasp Factory* had a potent and important relationship with the 'video-nasties' debate, and furthermore that it rebuffed the argument that political control of artistic representation was about protection of 'vulnerable' groups: women, working-class youths, ethnic minorities, and the morally weak, as compared to the cultured discrimination of the educated middle-classes. In this sense, *The Wasp Factory's* argument was about class in the largest sense of the word and as envisaged by Gramsci and his conception of dominant and subordinate blocs. The video nasties debate could therefore be seen as a 'moral panic' within the dominant social bloc about the moral fibre of the working classes and other socially marginalised groups. *The Busconductor Hines* and other novels by Kelman have a crucial relationship with more narrowly-defined debates about class, and in

particular about the growth of an underclass in Britain. Savage argues that the timing of this debate was telling, specifically the way in which it was suddenly imported from America and seized upon by some British writers 'to show that the working class is now no longer homogeneous and therefore to cast doubt on the value of class analysis per se.'¹⁶ Savage argues that this is not true, and his analysis suggests that the whole underclass debate, at least in its British manifestation, was politically and ideologically motivated.

Kelman's novels point to the repressive ideologies which underpin this debate. One of the key arguments deployed by right-wing proponents in arguments about the underclass, is that its existence is said to be indicative of a 'culture of dependency'.¹⁷ The argument is that people in the underclass are composed of members of the lower working class, ethnic minorities and single mothers, and that what links these groups is a common culture of dependency on state benefits and a minimal work-ethic. Kelman's novels attack the ideological basis of these premises, as well as rejecting the entire concept of an underclass. In *The Busconductor Hines* Hines's life is shown to consist of struggles against poverty, worries about job insecurity, and a dehumanising job. In a touching scene, the narrative describes how embarrassed Hines is when given a food parcel by his mother:

He detested being given bags by her but methods of declining weren't always available. Going downstairs he glanced inside: a tin of cold ham, a ginger cake, a packet of digestive biscuits, and an envelope containing £2. (p. 137)

The point here is that he actually needs such charity, and Hines is used by Kelman as a symbol for the millions of working-class people who struggle with poverty wages. For him, Kelman implies, the choice is between low wages and relative poverty, or a life in benefits and slightly greater austerity. In the *The Busconductor Hines* the narrative emphasises that Hines and his family face desperate financial and emotional struggles because they do not have the necessary luck, education, competitive

attitudes or social connections in a society increasingly premised upon inequality. Contrary to claims by conservatives about the underclass, Hines is shown to exhibit almost heroic efforts in the face of this fundamental unfairness. This political message is central to the novel and is carried through into its narrative structure, resulting in a powerful vein of the fantastic:

Crunch crunch crunch. The snow turned slush turned ice. What a transformation! And all at the hand of that mutable nature as well! it makes you think right enough. Take the clockwork universe: aye just pick it up and set the wheels in motion; tick tock etcetera; just lay it down now, aye, that's correct, the broad shoulders will attend to such a burden.

The brisk march along the wintry streets at 05 something hours. The discreet (sic) tenements on either side, high and yielding efforts while straight above them the blankly grey clouds firmly, permanently hanging there. (p. 113)

The passage begins with Hines's fantastic allegorical imagination about the mutability of substance and becomes an analysis of a mechanistic universe, 'the clockwork universe,' which can be 'set in motion,' by 'the broad shoulders.' But the new paragraph sharply deflates and by doing so ironises this poetic description of rational understanding. Hines is walking to his mind-crushing, low-pay, job at '05 something hours.' Around him is the bleak desolation of urban tenements: concrete ant hills provided for people on low wages like him or those on benefits. His musings on the mechanistic universe are given a black inflection by his perception of urban working-class housing. Readers are given a sense of the pigeonholing isolation which contemporary capitalist society fosters, the sense in which the people who live in these bleak tenements are locked into the logic of capitalist rationality, cogs in a giant ideological and economic mechanism.

Other contemporary writers have used fantasy and the fantastic to similar political effect. In *Downriver* by Ian Sinclair, London is turned into a giant Thatcherite dystopia. *The Child In Time* by Ian McEwan, presents a future British society which is recognisable and at the same time, disturbingly different. In McEwan's novel, Thatcherism has become the 'official' ideology in what is effectively a one-party state. The underclass has become

institutionalised, begging is licensed, the country's infrastructure is rotting, and political sclerosis is far advanced. In the novel, Stephen, the central character and narrator is involved in a government committee on child care. The committee is shown to euphemise its real role as an organ of social engineering:

It was generally agreed that the country was full of the wrong sort of people. There were strong opinions about what constituted a desirable citizenry and what should be done to procure one in the future. (p. 10)

How Late It Was, How Late draws the reader to similar conclusions: the British state is not only unwilling to help those citizens who have lost out in the current militant phase of capitalism, it actively plans to control, oppress and police these potential malcontents.

According to published research on the attitudes and economic makeup of 'the underclass', Kelman is correct when he describes his characters as lower working class, rather than as representatives of an underclass. Indeed, there appears to be no such thing as an underclass except in the imagination of right-wing politicians who are eager to demonize 'the enemy within' for political gain. Heath, in his detailed empirical study, finds that members of what might be described as the underclass are rather less fussy than those in employment about the kind of work which they are willing to do.¹⁸ He also finds that they do not exhibit any substantially different attitudes from those of mainstream society except, understandably, a greater cynicism. Heath, concludes that his research casts severe doubt on the whole notion of an underclass.¹⁹

This supports Kelman's representation of the contemporary working class and where he indicates that the current militant phase within capitalism, together with the destruction of traditional manufacturing industries, has created an impoverished lower working class which constitutes an army of cheap reserve labour. These are the hidden surplus population who, like Hines, are forced to endure poverty wages, job insecurity, and a mind-crushing repetitive routine, or face an even lower income on state benefits.

Kelman's fiction is filled with characters who face either unemployment or what Douglas Coupland's *Generation X* aptly describes as a 'McJob': 'a low pay, low prestige, low dignity, low benefit, no future job in the service sector' (p. 5). Kelman's characters infrequently work in the service sector of the economy, but have employment which conforms to every other aspect of a 'McJob'.

Kelman's short story, 'Not Not While The Giro', directly attacks the whole blame thesis which underlines some attitudes towards the unemployed and this army of cheap reserve labour cynically defined as 'the underclass'. The anonymous central characters satirically, defines himself by his dependency on State benefit, or 'the broo': 'Now then here I am in a curiously meagre surroundings living the life of a hapless pauper, my pieces of miserable silver supplied gratis by the Browbeaten Taxpayer' (p. 202). In a scathing attack on the stereotype of the 'dole scrounger' the narrator adds: 'Can I really say I enjoy life with money. When I have it I throw it away' (p. 193). As the story's title indicates, it implies that the entire life of the unemployed is defined by their everyday struggles and humiliation in the face of grinding poverty and a grudging 'dominant' society. Part of this devaluation by dominant society is shown to leak into the psyche of the unemployed, creating feelings of inferiority and marginality:

I am an idle goodfornothing. A neerdowell. The workhouse is too good for the likes of me. I own up I am incompatible with this Great British Society. My production rate is less than atrocious...I would say so Your Magnetship. And was Never Say Die the type of adage one could apply to the wretch. I believe so Your Industrialness.
Fuck off. (p. 196)

An implication of this passage is that in a society which aggressively promotes material success and capital accumulation, those who cannot compete are confined to a life of second-class citizenship, probable poverty and bitterness. 'Fuck off,' encapsulates this bitterness.

In Kelman's fiction Savage's arguments about timing of the 'underclass'

debate, are given a greater political import. *The Busconductor Hines*, *How Late It Was, How Late* and short stories such as 'Not Not While The Giro' disclose that the working class has not disappeared as some writers would have it, but rather than the working class has fractured resulting in an increasingly embittered and victimised lower working-class which vacillates between McJobs and poverty-level benefits. Kelman further indicates that the lower working class is a convenient ideological scapegoat, as well as a handy reservoir of cheap labour for 'Captains of Industry'.

In debates about the current restructuring of western societies, several writers have underlined the bleak social consequences which accompany these changes within capitalism. It seems that the negative side of post-fordism²⁰ is increasingly apparent. Amin draws attention to the international similarities between post-fordism's destructive effects when he writes, 'It is a process which has created a vast underclass of low-income or no-income communities increasingly abandoned by welfare programmes, and isolated from areas of the city "embellished" for the well-off.'²¹

Kelman's novels focus on the everyday material, emotional and psychological lives of individuals from, or living in, these ghettoised and marginalised communities and in this way they seek to counter the dehumanising view of the 'underclass' promulgated by right-wing ideologues. *How Late It Was, How Late* and other writings - short stories as well as novels - present their readers with a way of politically processing their experience of these phenomena. Being able to visualise social processes and systematically connect them with other aspects of contemporary economic, social, cultural, or political life is an essential first step on the way to resisting them politically. This is the central connection between systematic thought and political praxis which is central to Marxism and socialism. In Kelman's novels this key political mechanism is provided, largely, by the way in which he provides an ideological and economic explanation of debates over the underclass and points to their real role as a means of class repression by the dominant classes in a time of economic restructuring.

In *Espedair Street*, Weir, the novel's central narrator, also describes these increasingly ghettoised lower working-class communities, with their urban despoilation 'streets full of glass' evidence of drug abuse and alcoholism; 'buildings silted up overnight with empty bottles of fortified wine,' and which are roamed by violent gangs 'smashing holes in walls, wrecking cars and carrying out al fresco' facial surgery,' on their adolescent rivals (p. 14). *Espedair Street* is set in the 1970s and Weir's autobiographical outline of his early life stretches back into the 1960s.

The novel discloses that pockets of extreme poverty within working-class communities are not signs of some emerging lumpenproletariat, but rather an enduring aspect of working-class history. *Espedair Street* therefore sheds doubt on the idea that British society has seen substantive changes since the 1970s and emphasises historical continuities in the structure and priorities of British society. Furthermore, Weir's autobiographical narrative attacks middle-class intellectualising about the root causes of this poverty. About his childhood environment, the character comments:

The failure of post-war town planning? An indictment of the ghettoisation of problem families? It was all there. Bring lots of film and fashionable theories, chaps, but don't forget the lockable petrol cap and theft-proof wheelnuts for the Range-Rover. (p. 15)

This suggests to readers that contemporary middle-class intellectual discourse, such as that for example about the criminality of the underclass, is based not so much on actually helping people living in inner-city communities, but rather on the production of fashionable theories and film documentaries for consumption by the left and liberal British intelligentsia. The added moral implications of this iconoclastic view is that such intellectualising is patronising and hypocritical. Although middle-class intellectuals might visit such areas on expeditions and to gaze sympathetically at the poorer natives, they would not fundamentally trust their inhabitants nor forget 'lockable petrol cap and theft-proof wheelnuts' for their expensive safari vehicles. Arguments about the 'post-fordist' character of British society, indeed the whole concept of post-fordism itself,

might be included within this interpretation and Banks's novels could therefore be used to cast doubt on the legitimacy of arguments that British society has undergone substantive, sudden change since 1979.

Espedair Street suggests that images of class, particularly of the working class and of the alleged underclass, have been monopolised and to some extent created by the dominant bourgeois culture which Orwell described. There is supportive academic evidence for this view. Morris, for example finds that the notion of a substratum or residuum of 'dangerous classes' has been 'remarkably tenacious' throughout the history of British industrial society, and furthermore, she sets out how these 'dangerous classes' have been frequently conceptualised by dominant 'bourgeois' culture as a threat.²² Savage, also argues, correctly, that 'class' is frequently associated both by academics and in society at large with the working class and he points out how popular images of class, such as that promulgated by the television soap-opera *Coronation Street*, usually consist of sanitised representations of working-class life served up for cosy consumption.²³

In a sense this reinforces Orwell's argument about the totality of bourgeois culture, because in a society which has a dominant and hegemonic bourgeois culture it is predictable that this culture will just be known as 'the culture', whereas anything else will be seen as deviant, if not potentially dangerous. In the case of the underclass debate, the debate was publicly premised, as I have indicated, on the argument that this deviant sub-culture presented 'a problem' for the economic and social relations which underpin dominant, bourgeois culture.

In Kelman's novels representation of class is closely connected with rejecting the underclass thesis and making the alternative argument that the whole debate is evidence of the victimisation practised by the capitalist state and its allies in a period of economic restructuring. In contrast, Banks's novels present readers with a much less specific and more panoramic view of British society. Emphasis is on the psychological, and emotional results of the class system as whole, and on relations between classes in contemporary Britain. Consequently, Banks's characters are shown to

come from a wide range of social backgrounds. The Caulhames in *The Wasp Factory* are the last remnant of the local aristocracy, with only their ownership of the small island where they live and the name of a local public house to show for their family history. In *The Crow Road*, Prentice's family have handed over their ownership of the Gallanach glass factory to the Urvills, and both families are shown to be somewhere between upper-class and middle-class.

In *Walking On Glass* class relations are thematized via characterisation and the theme of sexual incest. In his quest for Ffitch's affections, the lower-middle-class Park is shown to aspire comically to the cultured status which he associates with her background. This is integral to the plot of the novel and it implies that the lower middle class slavishly aspire to the culture and social status of the upper middle or upper class in Britain. Furthermore, the incestuous sexual relationship between Ffitch and her brother Slater, and which is eventually revealed to readers, carries the implication that the British upper class still "keeps to its own". In Slater and Ffitch's case this class solidarity is extended into incest, a very literal and perverse extension of upper-class cohesion and insularity. Banks also indicates that the Conservative party is the natural home of this traditional British upper class. Slater and Ffitch's father is revealed to be 'the Conservative M.P. for Salop West' and it is because he is standing for re-election in the 1987 General Election around which the realistic narratives of the novel are set, as well as his membership of various right-wing 'moral' pressure groups, that Slater and Ffitch must conceal their affair. Slater comments: 'The old bugger having made his reputation peddling this sort of reactionary moralist nonsense, the revelation that his two children were humping each other would have finished him' (p. 207).

Slater and Ffitch are shown to be protecting the status of their family, their class, and the reputation of the political party which serves the interests of their class. In this way *Walking On Glass* presents readers with a complex picture of the way in which status, public morality, class, the political system and sexuality intertwine in British society. Class relations are shown to overlap with these areas, and perceptions of class are shown to be as

important in these relations as more objective socioeconomic considerations. In a comment about the twisted logic of the British class system, Banks shows how the lower middle-class Park is the greatest victim of Slater and Ffitch's deception.

One important aspect of Banks's novels, is the way in which they avoid stereotypical or outdated representation of class. In particular, they explore the ways in which class is being recast in the contemporary British society which Kelman's novels also depict. This is a crucial connection between novels by the two authors. Lennox in *The Bridge* comes from an upper-working-class background, but by virtue of his university education and employment in the oil industry as a geological consultant, is very difficult to define in terms of class. Lennox is a representative of a strata of well paid white-collar technical workers and who are indispensable for the technological aspects of contemporary capitalist production. Similarly, Colley in *Complicity* is a symbol for a social group of technologically-literate white-collar information workers thrown up by the emergence of the mass media and cultural industries in the post-war period. As such the way he is represented can help illuminate several substantial debates about the role of class in British society.

In a short scene where Colley meets several of his friends, Banks sketches out a social portrait of this new white-collar group of workers, and which commentators have perceived as 'the service class', 'new middle class', or as evidence of the end of clear class boundaries altogether.²⁴ Yvonne and William have come to meet Colley and 'do lunch.' Yvonne is carefully described, 'tall and lithe and sveltly muscular in a dark shirt and jacket. Silk shirt. Black hair short, trimmed to a nape in a new, even more severe haircut .' William is 'blond as Yvonne is dark, built like an Olympic oarsman, perfect teeth and with a handshake like a gorilla' (p. 62). The pair, as Colley soon indicates, are a professional couple, each with successful careers in business. Yvonne specialises in bankruptcy management and has risen to become a director of a highly successful company, Colley ironically adds: 'It's not a small firm any more. Growth industry' (p. 65). William, like Lennox, works in the technological complex, prominent in contemporary capitalism.

Colley informs readers: 'William works for a company which makes them; their Scottish manufacturing base is in South Queensferry but the company's H.Q. is in Maryland in the States' (p. 64).

In common with other central character in several of Bank's novels, Lennox in *The Bridge* Prentice in *The Crow Road* and Park in *Walking On Glass*, Colley has had a university education, and his narrative describes how his friendship with Yvonne and William developed while at university. What connects all three characters, therefore, is this level of education, and Banks further suggests to readers that the expansion of higher education in contemporary Britain is staffing the media and corporate capitalist economic bases out of which this new middle class arises. Yvonne and William are part of this ideologically conformist, self-disciplined and self-confident work force, quite the opposite of narrators in Kelman's fiction. William's squeaky-clean physical description is used by Banks to emphasise the character's self-confident presence and conformist psychology. Yvonne's 'modern' and stylish, but sober, apparel denotes her role as a career women, as well as her financial ability to purchase designer clothes, and preoccupation with 'style'.

Colley's description of both characters, discloses their preoccupation with a 'sense of style' and individuality which has been identified by some writers in their outline of the distinctive culture of the new middle class. In terms of occupation, the couple symbolise the direction of contemporary capitalism. Yvonne is described by Colley as the director of a company which specialises in bankruptcy management. As Colley acidly observes, the success of Yvonne's company is symptomatic of the current state of capitalism with its job insecurity, redundancy, and economic distress caused by what is euphemistically described as 'downsizing.' In *Espedair Street*, Weir describes how economic restructuring 'downsized' Scotland's manufacturing base during the late 1970s and early 1980s, and thereby ended the only career opportunity for working-class youths who have neither the inclination nor opportunity to continue in education (p. 13). *Espedair Street* draws attention to the way in which current economic circumstances offer working-class children like Weir or Lennox with little or

no real choice: by educating themselves, accepting the values of mainstream society, fulfilling the conditions of capitalist wage-labour, with a little luck, they might reach the 'good life' promised by contemporary bourgeois society; otherwise poverty-pay McJobs, social marginalisation, and the ritual humiliation of accepting 'safety net' subsistence-level state benefits are their likely fate.

Yvonne and William, and to a lesser extent Colley himself, are shown to be examples of the post-industrial work force who will prosper in the current period of decentered and dynamic capitalism. William, as Colley emphasises, works in the 'sunrise' silicon industries which have replaced the traditional Scottish manufacturing base. Like Colley he is shown to live a highly mobile life, commuting between Scotland and America. William, and to a lesser extent Colley, typify the kind of mobile worker which some writers have claimed, indicate the end of class if the concept is understood in the sense of 'hierarchically organised *national entities*.' ²⁵

William and Yvonne live in an exclusive high-security estate provided for the most successful of the new class:

their delightful, triple-garaged, split-level lounged, sauna'd, jacuzzi'd executive villa with ensuite facilities and satellite dish set in an exclusive walled prestige development among mature trees with a residents-only country clubhouse, restaurant, pool, Nautilus gym, squash and tennis court. (p. 64)

This has parallels with the urban ghettoisation commonly noted by more critical academic accounts of post-fordism. In a period in which society's economically and socially vulnerable are either ignored, condemned, or left to the market, and during which large income disparities have further widened, the tendency is for the successful to retire to suitably fortified, high income estates cut-off from the wider community, yet ironically as the narrative notes, connected to the wider international media by their telecommunications facilities. This connection between the media sector of the new class, symbolised by the satellite dish, and between its other managerial or professional segments, is underscored by Colley's

relationship with Yvonne and William.

Banks uses Colley's sexual relationship with Yvonne, to emphasise how they share an essential emotional emptiness. Like Lennox in *The Bridge*, professional success is shown to be accompanied by an unsatisfactory personal life. Colley attempts to fill this absence through drugs and his commitment to practising journalism as an ethical trade. Yvonne, it is implied, also addresses her spiritual void through her career, but also by an apparent investment in her marriage to William. Readers are led to believe that her marriage is actually born out of a need for security, convenience, and status rather than any genuine love for her husband. In William's momentary absence, a dialogue between Colley and Yvonne is used to emphasise how she perceives her husband as a necessary inconvenience:

Yvonne and I watch him go then we lean over the table towards each other at the same time.

'God, you look fuckable,' I tell her.

'Mm-hmm,' she says. She shrugs. 'Sorry about all this.'

'Never mind. God, you look fuckable.'

'Want to meet up the day he goes?'

'Yes,' I gulp. 'Yes yes yes.' (p. 65)

Sexual antics ensue, and serve to reinforce the reader's opinion that their affair is based on sexual need rather than any deeper emotional commitment. As I set out in Chapter Two, novels by the author criticise the shallow materialism and spiritual hollowness of contemporary British society. In Colley's affair this is keenly felt, as well as given a more specific import so far as the novel's representation of class is concerned. The implication by Banks, is that personal relationships among members of this new middle class epitomise the more general alienation created by contemporary British society. For all their career success, education, and outward self-confidence, their personal relationships are emotionally arid and unsatisfactory.

A key theoretical question posed by *Complicity* is the extent to which Colley, Yvonne and William belong to a class. The novel's plot also hangs

upon this question, because William is eventually assassinated by Andy, and he justifies his murder on class grounds: 'he was one of *them*' (p. 302). By 'them' readers are led to the conclusion that Andy means the dominant capitalist class who have benefited most from the Thatcherite years and emergence of the post-fordist economy. Andy's analysis of William also discloses a different dimension to his 'cheery and affable' exterior.

Andy describes how William is an ambitious man who had helped to finance the Tory party, 'putting respectable amounts in Tory coffers for a decade,' and attempting to buy a Knighthood. His narrative also indicates that William upholds the free-market, right-wing view of the poor and provides the 'usual excuse' for the criteria behind his charitable donations, by claiming to support a charity 'that didn't encourage scroungers' (p. 302). He also, readers learn, talked of 'trading in Yvonne for a more up-market, user-friendly model preferably with her own title and a daddy in big business or the government,' as well as vigorously pursuing 'a non-ethical investment programme' (p. 302).

Thus, William is described as an up-and-coming member of the dominant capitalist class and through him Banks shows readers what identifies members of the dominant capitalist class. They are shown to buy prestige and power, see their personal life and friends as an extensions of their career games, are ruthless in business with a callous disregard for the moral dimensions of their activities, ignore or demonize the 'undeserving poor' by recourse to a blame thesis and labels such as 'scroungers', fund whichever political party serves their interests, have a disproportionate influence at the highest levels of the state and upon the political process, and are effectively beyond the law .

The occupations of those whom Andy assassinates throughout the novel place William's class membership in a more specific context for readers. Sir Toby Bisset, Andy's first victim, is depicted as an editor of a national right-wing newspaper. Mr Persimmon is an ex-Minister who has effortlessly moved from public office to the boardrooms of industry. Mr Oliver is a symbol of the immoral entrepreneurship fostered by the capitalist state. Sir

Rufus is a front for British capitalists seeking quick profits from their investments in the third world. Andy's 'hit list' discloses that the 'dominant' class in Britain can be found in the highest offices of the state, in multinational corporations, and by looking at media ownership. Furthermore, Banks also implies that this class has a distinctive 'culture,' with a set of attitudes, family and institutional connections, as well as strategies for maintaining power - such as the ability to move between the political establishment and between business elites. Banks's analysis of the composition and socioeconomic location of the 'dominant class' is sophisticated and it also fits in with some sociological accounts which address the question of whether Britain still has a ruling class. Scott, for example, in his detailed study, comes to the conclusion that:

Britain is ruled by a capitalist class whose economic dominance is sustained by the operations of the state and whose members are disproportionately represented in the power elites which rule the state apparatus. 26

William seeks to become one of this capitalist class and to do so he must generate the necessary money, cultivate the connections, and conform to the attitudes which are required for membership. In explaining his motifs for murdering William, Andy argues that his victim would have been ultimately successful 'and turn into the kind of man like the others I killed' (p. 303).

The relationship between Colley's radical articles and Andy's terrorist actions chimes, in a fairly obvious way, with the novel's title. But Banks also suggests that Colley and others in the media like him, are complicit with the ruling class. Andy's narrative casts doubt on his perception of William, and indicates that this distortion of judgement springs from his unwillingness to judge his friends by the same moral criteria as he judges more abstract political foes such as multinational brewing conglomerates.

This further implies that Colley's political radicalism is inconsistent with his structural position within the media establishment. Andy, is used by Banks to underscore Colley's political inconsistency and quotes, what readers learn, are the journalist's own description of the popular press as 'comics

for the semi-literate; propaganda sheets controlled by foreign billionaires' (p. 299). Colley's relationship to William and Yvonne, as well as contradicting his own political beliefs, suggests to readers that the 'new middle class' is not so much a class as a faction of the bourgeoisie, and furthermore that this faction tends to support the class system and capitalist mode of production.

Complicity's view of class is therefore strongly at odds with claims that the bourgeoisie is fragmenting, or that class is disappearing altogether. With respect to debates about the rise of a new middle-class, Featherstone supports *Complicity's* view of the composition of the contemporary British bourgeoisie. He argues that what some sociologists describe as the new middle class is actually an expanded faction of the bourgeoisie rather than some entirely new social group altogether.²⁷ As I set out in Chapter Four, Featherstone, following Bourdieu, also argues that one distinctive characteristic of what he describes as the new petite bourgeoisie, is its preoccupation with customising a lifestyle and stylistic self-consciousness. This connects with the ideal 'new' consumer being promulgated by advertising and marketing, and which I focused in on when I analysed 'My Generation.' Colley in *Complicity* is this kind of ideal consumer glorified by current advertising, and whom Featherstone, ironically, describes as living in:

The world of men and women who quest for the new and the latest in relationships and experiences, who have a sense of adventure and take risks to explore life's options to the full, who are conscious they only have one life to live and must work hard to enjoy, experience and express it.²⁸

Colley's consumer lifestyle - part rebel, part hedonist - is shown, ironically, to lead to the cancer which will probably terminate his life. In this sense, Colley's characterisation, and *Complicity's* plot, can be seen as a systematic criticism of the ideal bourgeois consumer currently promulgated in advertising and marketing.

A second irony can be observed when my analysis of 'My Generation' is

taken into account. This is because the promotion - of which *The Wasp Factory* was a part - was shown to be promoting this 'ideal' lifestyle and addressing the young upwardly mobile consumer which *Complicity* critically examines. A subversive possibility is also disclosed by this interpretation. *Complicity*, could be seen as criticising the lifestyle and ideologies of the readership which Banks's novels have appealed to, and which they are marketed at in promotions like 'My Generation'. As with *The Wasp Factory*, the novel connects with its readers in a particularly direct and satirical way.

Complicity warns its readers that social class infects what they like to regard as their 'individual' attitudes and opinions. In *Complicity* Banks can also be seen to draw readers to the ultimate conclusion that despite radical and independent voices within society, symbolised by Colley, the structural pressures of capitalist society do not permit any substantive independence from class alignments and interests. Colley's experience of the Gulf war is used by Banks to show that individuality is a romantic insignificance beside the huge impersonal, technological, forces currently mobilised by western capitalist societies.

This thesis undermines the argument that members of the new middle class act 'more as individuals and less as members of classes.'²⁹ *Complicity* shows that the radical individualism prevalent within new factions of the bourgeoisie is ultimately contradicted by their socioeconomic position within capitalism. In this sense, the optimistic vein which runs through Banks's novels is bleakly contradicted by the way in which class is represented in *Complicity*, because the novel supports Orwell's argument about the pervasive totality of bourgeois society and its values.

The Crow Road elaborates upon this perspective when it underlines the way in which the electronic media promote and reinforce the materialist values of contemporary capitalist society at an everyday level. This is shown to be a world, as Prentice puts it, with a 'scummy surface...of effervescent present' (p. 207), a media society where consumption and material success are elevated to overriding objectives. One implication of

this view, as I indicated a little earlier, is the argument that British society has not changed substantially since 1979, but rather, and as Feather argues [6] with regard to publishing, it makes more sense to speak of shifting pressures and continuity rather than radical change.

This interpretation of British society is supported by Kelman's novels, particularly their representation of disaffection within British working-class communities. *How Late It Was, How Late* places Sammy's feelings of alienation in a wider historical context. He informs the reader:

When the time comes ye move. Simple as that. Nay point hoping for the best. Ye could spend yer life doing that; hoping. If ye were gony sit about all day hoping then okay, go ahead, but that's all ye'll do, know what I mean, it's like waiting, ye're aye waiting. (p.212-213)

How Late It Was, How Late therefore suggests a different quality to current disaffections within working-class communities. What underpins the alienation, bitterness and anger felt by Sammy, Hines, Peter and others is the intensity with which what Galbraith called the 'affluent society' currently expects all its citizens to conform to its values. In the 'scummy surface' of a society dominated by capitalist priorities, citizenship is shown to be increasingly premised on the ability to consume, conform, and co-operate. Class is shown to be bound up with this system of conditioning, albeit in complex, subtle ways. As with readers of *The Bridge*, *The Crow Road*, *Complicity*, *Espedair Street* or *Walking On Glass*, readers of Kelman's novels are left with the feeling that the capitalist class system has not disappeared but rather prospers, adapting itself to new conditions and surviving to abuse new generations.

Endnotes

- 1 Orwell, 'Proletarian', p. 40.
- 2 Orwell, 'Proletarian', p. 41.
- 3 Luke Spencer, 'The Grudge Is True: Working-Class Poetry In Post-War Britain', *Literature and History*, 3rd series 1/1 Spring 1992: p. 29.
- 4 Alan Walker, 'Poverty and Income Distribution In Britain 1979 - 1989', *The Social Effects Of Free Market Policies: An International Text*, ed. Ian Taylor (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), p. 35.
- 5 John Hopkins, *The Rise and Decline Of The English Working - Classes* (London: Weidenfield and Nicholson, 1991), pp. 270 - 272.
- 6 Billington, p. 104.
- 7 Billington, p. 111.
- 8 Billington, p. 108.
- 9 Billington, p. 108.
- 10 Billington, p. 107.
- 11 Billington, p. 118.
- 12 Ash Amin, 'Post-fordism: Models, Fantasies and phantoms of Transition', *Post-Fordism: A Reader*, ed. Ash Amin (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1994), p. 1.
- 13 Alan Walker, 'Poverty and Income Distribution In Britain 1979 - 1989', *The Social Effects Of Free Market Policies: An International Text*, ed. Ian Taylor (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), p. 38.
- 14 A short story in *The Burn*.
- 15 Norman Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1992), p. 7.
- 16 Savage, p. 18.
- 17 Smith, p. 3.
- 18 Heath, p. 36.
- 19 Heath, p. 37.
- 20 I have some doubts about the phrase, I am not convinced that contemporary British society is best described as post-fordist. First because to describe an entire society by recourse to one label seems to run the danger of being over-simplified. Secondly because the term has no clear definition. Thirdly because I believe that there is no clear evidence that the social and economic organisation of British society has undergone such substantive change since 1979 that a new periodising term like post-fordism is required.
- 21 Ash Amin, 'Post-fordism: Models, Fantasies and phantoms of Transition', *Post-Fordism: A Reader*, ed. Ash Amin (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1994), p. 32.
- 22 Lydia Morris, *Dangerous Classes* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 10.
- 23 Mike Savage and Andrew Miles, *The Remaking Of The British Working-Class 1840 - 1940* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 14.

- 24 Featherstone, p. 45.
- 25 Scott Lash and John Urry, *Economies Of Sign and Space* (London: SAGE, 1994), p. 323.
- 26 John Scott, *Who Rules Britain?* (Oxford: Polity Press/Blackwell, 1991), p. 151.
- 27 Featherstone, p. 87.
- 28 Featherstone, p. 86.
- 29 Tim Butler, 'The Debate Over The Middle Classes', *Social Change and The Middle Classes*, eds. Tim Butler and Mike Savage (London: University College Press, 1995), p. 31. Butler reports this view in his analysis of Scott Lash and John Urry's book *Economies Of Sign and Space* (London: SAGE, 1994).

Conclusion: Gestures Towards A Better Place

Before concluding I offer a summary of my thesis:

In **Chapter One**, I outlined current debates over evaluation. I noted the fragmented and disorganised state of contemporary literary study, and emphasised how this posed practical difficulties for any study of contemporary British novels. I identified two negative tendencies within current debates over literary evaluation, and argued that literary study needed to be more systematic, explanatory and coherent. To support my case I examined: *The Western Canon* by Harold Bloom, *Literary Into Cultural Studies* by Anthony Easthope, and *The Way We Live Now* by Richard Hoggart. I argued that a rational approach to literary study was also very likely to be a politically-informed approach to studying texts. I pointed out that believing value was produced by the valuing community or society, did not prevent the researcher from acknowledging the legitimacy of these beliefs.

In **Chapter Two** I introduced and interpreted the novels of Iain Banks and James Kelman. As regards Kelman, I argued that his novels aimed towards a contemporary novel which spoke to, and to some extent for, an audience which he felt had not been served by either popular or literary fiction. I demonstrated that recognition of this fundamental political objective was central to understanding their use of 'voice'; dialect; representation of social class; characterisation, and relationship to other working-class novels. This was reinforced by reference to a private correspondence with the author, as well as his non-fictional writings.

Banks's novels, I argued, disclosed a deliberate, politically motivated, blurring of literary and popular generic forms. I emphasised their satirical dimensions and the prevalence of subversive humour. I went on to outline how they were shot through with systematic criticisms of the ethos, organisation, and priorities, of contemporary British society.

In Chapter Two I also briefly indicated how critics and reviewers had received novels by both authors. I pointed out that critics had shown uncertainty about how to categorise Bank's novels, and also how Kelman's novels had been inserted into a bewildering array of literary traditions, and attacked on account of their political dimensions.

This research finding underpinned **Chapter Three**, where I assessed the critical reception given to both author's novels in far greater depth. To focus this chapter I assessed Kelman's role in the 1994 Booker Prize. The concepts of ideology and hegemony were introduced, and subsequently assessed. I used them to interpret and explain the tone and substance of critical reactions to Kelman's success at the 1994 Booker Prize. Comments by George Orwell were also used to support my perspective on relations between different parts of the literary establishment. Using hegemony and ideology, I went on to analyse the critical reception given to *The Wasp Factory*, which was Banks's first published novel. I argued that *The Wasp Factory* had an important, subversive, relationship to debates about artistic censorship and which were particularly current at its time of publication.

More generally, I indicated how Gramsci's analysis of the literary establishment could help to explain how critics had attacked, ignored, or appropriated, the political dimensions of both author's novels, tendencies which I had identified in Chapter Two. A significant part of Chapter Three was cross-referenced with Appendix A, where I examine the concept of ideology in more detail.

Chapter Four introduced a new line of enquiry into my thesis, as well as continuing one research finding from the previous chapter. In Chapter Three I had established that there was a link between publishers' interests and critics' judgments in the reaction following Kelman's success at the 1994 Booker Prize. Chapter Four's objective was to assess the practices, structure and ethos of contemporary publishing and bookselling.

I went on to identify and argue against two prominent objections to this approach. To deepen and enrich my analysis I called on accounts by

Andrew Milner, Raymond Williams, and I. R. Willison. To focus Chapter Four, I anchored my analysis by reference to novels by Kelman and Banks. This entailed:

- A re-examination of the 1994 Booker Prize in light of Secker and Warburg's role within the structure of contemporary publishing, and taking account of *Culture* by Raymond Williams. I also analysed Kelman's role within Secker and Warburg's overall desire to accrue long-term literary prestige.
- How Banks wrote *The Wasp Factory* specifically hoping to appeal to 'mainstream' commercial publishers, how its unconventional and generically eclectic narrative sprang from a tension between this commercial imperative and Banks's own desire to write 'non-mainstream' novels, and how publication of *The Wasp Factory* by Macmillan in 1984 can be seen in light of the company's wider strategic ambitions within the literary marketplace of the 1980s.
- An examination of the role of the *The Wasp Factory* within a commercial promotion by Waterstones in association with *The Observer*.

Chapter Five began by stressing how social class has been an enduring concern for British novelists and writers. This leads into a brief examination of possible problems with use of the concept in an academic context. As with my analysis of publishing and bookselling in Chapter Four, I sought to identify a productive way around obstacles. I offered two approaches:

- By relating the way in which class and class structure are represented in novels by Kelman and Banks to wider debates about class and social structure current within Sociology and cultural studies.
- Through analysis of the class composition of the 'British reading public.' This approach is the substance of Appendix A. The Appendix is partly meant to complement and enrich a reading of Chapter Five, but it is also

designed to stand as a useful extra study of the relationship between class and between contemporary literary culture in Britain.

I went on to show in Chapter Five how novels by Kelman and Banks roundly rejected the underclass thesis put forward in some quarters. I also demonstrated how novels by both authors reject the thesis that class has ceased to be a social concept which is relevant to British society, or that class is less important than it was. Through reference to *Complicity* by Banks, I also made reference back to Chapter Four and suggested that *Complicity* criticises the advertising ploy through which *The Wasp Factory* was promoted.

I think I have offered some positive alternatives to an archaic 'heritage' literary studies. Class, for example, is an important area of debate within sociology and cultural studies. It is also a key area of interdisciplinary study and argument. To address some of these debates about social class enriches an understanding of contemporary novels and, potentially, informs the wider discussions themselves by adding a valuable cultural and psychological, dimension to more scientific and empirical modes of intellectual enquiry. Kelman's novels disclose what everyday life is like for those who are live on benefits, or work in the low income jobs in what is called a post-fordist society. They convey how it feels for the unemployed and disadvantaged in a society which ignores, chastises, or victimises such groups. By doing so, they add a moral edge to abstract, and potentially euphemistic, phrases such as lower working class or the underclass. Furthermore, attention is given to the symbolic, emotional, and psychological, effects of power relations, which Thompson sees as an important objective for future Marxist studies.¹

As was also indicated in Chapter Five, cultural studies has recently seen calls for renewed attention to the concept of 'reproduction'.² My thesis supports a return to research into the ways in which what Orwell described as 'bourgeois culture' is reproduced and reinvigorated. The evaluations of critics (Chapter Three and Appendix A); the organisation of publishing and

function of advertising (Chapter Four); and class (Chapter Five and Appendix B), could all be seen as mechanisms through which a set of bourgeois or dominant cultural relations are reproduced within literary culture. In this sense my thesis could be described as a study of these reproductive forces as they act upon contemporary British fiction, with my examples being novels by Kelman and Banks. This concluding perspective also casts a new light on debates about evaluation and which were outlined in Chapter One. To develop this new angle on my thesis and address other issues raised during research, I turn to Carey.

John Carey has written a very disturbing account of how literary intellectuals in the period from 1880 to 1939 imagined 'the masses' as a culturally inferior and almost semi-human rabble.³ In the postscript to his account, he offers a link between the irrational cultural prejudices of intellectuals during this period and current strains of 'anti popular theory':

But just as the spread of literacy to the 'masses' impelled intellectuals in the early twentieth-century to produce a mode of culture (modernism) that the masses could not enjoy, so the new availability of culture through television and other popular media has driven intellectuals to evolve an anti-popular cultural mode that can process all existing culture and take it beyond the reach of the majority.⁴

Carey's analysis has immediate relevance to the critical reception given to novels by Banks and Kelman and which I outlined in Chapter Three. For example, a post-modern interpretation of *The Wasp Factory* detracts from its satirical relationship to media debates about censorship. It also detracts from the novel's affiliations with popular narrative forms such as the horror movie. The implication of such post-modern interpretations, is that *The Wasp Factory* and other novels by Banks, cannot be understood without readers first understanding and then applying post-modern academic theory. A consequence of this anti-popular cultural mode is that interpretation of Banks's novels is taken out of the reach of non-academic readers. This has the political result of making the author's novels less accessible and relevant to contemporary British society. Similarly, claims that Kelman's novels are existentialist, has the effect of destroying their

intended connection with what Kelman describes as 'ordinary men and women', the majority of working-class readers who have not been through higher education. The label 'existentialist' also potentially compromises their relationship to the social injustices and economic constraints suffered by characters like Hines in their everyday life: Hines does not come to stand as a symbol for the millions of working class people who struggle daily with low pay and job insecurity, but rather as a symbol of 'life's unfairness'.

My suspicion of existentialist or post-modern labels also extends to Scottish pigeonholes. Neither author sees himself, or by extension his novels, as determined by an exclusive nationalistic definition. In an interview with Iain Parker for *Scottish Socialist Voice* during 1996, Banks commented: 'I am Scottish and a writer, that's all.'⁵ This is almost identical to Kelman's view of how his writings relate to 'Scottishness'.⁶ Furthermore, to describe novels by either author as part of a Scottish tradition can be seen in the light of my thesis, to invite the kind of marginalisation outlined in Chapter Three, whereby novels by Kelman were recommended to English readers on account of their 'exotic' (patronising) representation of Glaswegian culture. Instead, in Chapter Two, I briefly explored some of ways in which life in contemporary Scotland is represented in novels by each author and within a wider understanding of Scotland's place within a British capitalist society.

I believe that this approach takes account of the important Scottish dimension to novels by both novelists, but avoids the political dangers inherent with any exclusive nationalist approach. Chapters Three and Four, also raise doubts about the way in which Kelman, along with other contemporary novelists such as Alasdair Gray, are claimed to belong to a 'new Glasgow writing', or as part of a 'Scottish renaissance'.⁷ This does not imply that Scottish novelists are not producing innovative new novels, or that these novels are not part of a renaissance in Scottish literary life, it simply casts doubt on the way in which their national identity is packaged and promoted as an intellectual-commercial venture. Wallace notes how London publishers were keen to 'seize on the commercial promise of a rejuvenated literary tradition that might conform to the dictates of a new and lucrative "fashion": a marketable efflorescence of the Scottish imagination.'⁸

In light of Chapter Four, this observation is given a greater purchase, and it 'the Scottish novel' can be perceived as yet another new area of research and development by publishers in a period of dynamic reorganisation. This connects with a wider interpretation of my thesis, and comes back to arguments by Carey.

As was argued in Chapter One, current debates over evaluation are marked by nihilism and irrationalism. Following Carey's thesis, what connects relativist doctrine with conservative arguments about the need for absolute cultural standards, is their connection to this anti-popular cultural mode. This suggests that current debates over evaluation are anxieties about establishing cultural-ideological authority over the privileged 'literary' domain in a period during which literary culture is increasingly organised by mercantile interests and effected through commercial methods. The commercialisation of literary culture is hardly a new process, and current intellectual panics about the 'state' of literary culture have an historical pedigree, but what marks out the period since 1979 is the extent to which commercial pressures and imperatives have multiplied. This inflation in commercial pressures has a relationship with renewed anxieties about the future of cultural standards and cultural evaluation.

Chapter Four of my thesis adds detail to this interpretation because it shows how the commercially-driven interest of publishers and booksellers was behind the reorganisation of the British literary scene during the 1980s. It also, and as I pointed with my analysis of Secker and Warburg in Chapter Four, forced publishers to renegotiate literary standards. Expanding markets, increasingly organising how readers 'value' literature, bringing sophisticated marketing strategies to bear, the assimilation of 'quality' publishing into the corporate economy, developing new genres, and offering consumers a literary scene not based on class or education, but on disposable income and spending power, are all factors and activities which can be seen to threaten the process of social reproduction which Williams identifies. In these circumstances it becomes more difficult for any class, class faction, or other social group like the intelligentsia, to claim authority over an area of culture, because culture is increasingly seen and felt to be

purchased like any other commodity. Speaking about the arts after 1950, Hobsbawm captures this commercially-driven cultural saturation when he comments:

The novelty was that technology had drenched everyday life in private as well as public with art. The 'work of art' was lost in the flow of words, of sounds, of images, in the universal environment of what would once have been called art.⁹

In this environment commerce comes into significant conflict with class interests or pretensions, and ideologies of literary value are persistently punctured by the activities of the market.

Paradoxically, as Hoggart underscores, this environment also works against socialism or any other political practice which is opposed to capitalism in its current form because there is no room for any critical belief-systems in the intellectual marketplace of a capitalist society which are not tainted by the tendency towards relativism, moral erosion, skepticism, or hollow materialism. As was shown in Chapter Two, in Banks's novels these tendencies are shown to lead into forms of personal crisis and breakdown. The social and political self is shown to come into conflict with the ideologies and requirements of contemporary British society. This problem is also connected with a practical conundrum for socialist novelists and artists.

As I set out in Chapters Two and Three, Kelman's dissatisfaction with the elitism and irrelevance of literary fiction on the one hand, and on the other hand, what he saw as the ideologically conformist, stylistically formulaic character of commercial fiction, led him to envisage a new form of accessible but literary fiction. Both literary and popular markets were rejected on political and artistic grounds. Banks, by contrast, aimed for the popular or what he described as the 'mainstream' market with his non-science fiction novels. But he used popular narrative forms to convey a strong socialist message.

Both approaches have significant precedents among other socialist novelists and writers more generally, and are responses to the same fundamental political-practical dilemma: the political writer is left with the unwelcome knowledge that producing texts for popular, mass market mediums carries the risk of compromising their wider political objectives and range of artistic expression, while working outside the institutions of mainstream literary production guarantees these freedoms, but is likely to restrict the size of their readership. Recognising this problem is central to evaluating Kelman and Banks's fictional writings, and the problem itself flows from the current commercial organisation of literary culture.

The critical reception given to Tony Harrison's televised version of *V.* has some intriguing parallels with that given to Kelman's success at the 1994 Booker Prize, and comparative study would be a useful subject for future research. In the 1989 Bloodaxe second edition of *V.*, Neil Astley, editor of this small radical press, succinctly sets out this political dilemma. Astley notes how the poem undermines 'commonplace assumption' about the disappearance of class, and the priority of market forces in contemporary British society. He comments:

When Bloodaxe first published *V.* in 1985, we couldn't claim that a few thousand copies of a poetry book could do much to challenge those kinds of complacent assumptions, even if it was as *Tribune* said - 'the most outstanding social poem of the past 25 years'. Richard Eyre's Channel Four film of *V.* changed all that. Thanks to the publicity, generated initially by the tabloid press, the poem reached an audience of several million - and not just those who saw the programme but also the readership of *The Independent*, which printed the whole poem.¹⁰

Astley's analysis underlines the current political and cultural need for politically alternative publishing institutions, which use the market rather than conform to its rationale, and which can guarantee writers artistic and political freedom, while also being able to call on commercially effective market arrangements. As Astley points out, the radical publisher Bloodaxe, was able to support publication of a few thousand copies of *V.*, but was unable to use the kind of distribution networks or fund the kind of promotion

which might have brought Harrison's poem to a wider audience. Politically speaking, television was a far more effective vehicle for V. than print.

Worpole also notes this difficulty. He comments, 'the commercial publishing industry, on its own, cannot meet all the demands that a cultural democracy might fairly make upon it.'¹¹ Worpole's comment is more pertinent than ever when seen from the late 1990s, because conglomeration and takeover have continued within publishing, and independent bookselling is in serious decline. This agenda is also supported by the attitude of publishers and booksellers towards Kelman's political-literary strategy at the 1994 Booker Prize.¹²

Without a genuinely independent and substantive set of alternative market routes for radical fiction, the conundrum which Astley describes will continue, and commentators will set out how novelists with wider political objectives see them compromised by the activities of the market or warped by the dominant commodity relations of current literary culture. Interested and politically motivated literary intellectuals who respect literary diversity might wish to donate some of their time, or support research, into finding ways of developing politically and commercially effective literary institutions. Until these are established we will have to rely on the best efforts of novelist like Kelman and Banks as they criticise market rationality through its institutions and point instead to a better place.

Endnotes

- ¹ E. P. Thompson, 'Agenda For Radical History', *Critical Enquiry*, Winter 1995, Vol. 21, No. 2: p. 303.
- ² Storey, *Cultural*, p. 116.
- ³ Carey, p. 15.
- ⁴ Carey, p. 215.
- ⁵ *Culture Shock*, Iain Banks Webzine 1997: p. 7.
- ⁶ *Some Recent Attacks*, p. 78.
- ⁷ Andrew Michael Roberts, *Bloomsbury Guides To English Literature: The Novel From Its Origins To The Present Day* (London: Bloomsbury, 1992), p. 292.
- ⁸ Gavin Wallace, Introduction, *The Scottish Novel Since The Seventies*, eds. Gavin Wallace and Randall Stevenson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), p. 4.
- ⁹ Hobsbawm, p. 520.
- ¹⁰ Neil Astley, 'The Riff-Raff Takes Over', V., Tony Harrison 2nd ed. (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1989), p. 35.
- ¹¹ Worpole, p. 112.

¹² It remains to be seen whether publication of Kelman's most recent work, *The Good Times* and published only last week as I write this, will augur a new truce between its author and the critical establishment. The signs, however, are not good. David Robinson writing for *The Sunday Telegraph* (27 July 1998, p.14) comments, for example, that he was eventually won over by the 'dour precision of Kelman's writing' but attacks (surprise, surprise) the way in which Kelman's narrators swear 'which is both irksome and monotonous.' 'It suggests', he adds, 'that there has been a mass epidemic of Tourette's Syndrome north of Hadrian's Wall.' Robinson ends with a very strange 'endorsement' of *The Good Times*. Indeed his final evaluation is reminiscent of publishers' complaints at and after the 1994 Booker Prize ceremony:

If you want a good laugh on the beach this summer, this book should be avoided like the plague. The mood of despair never lifts. But there are moments here of painful truth and true pain.

Robinson's own grudging praise seems like a painful moment for him.

Meanwhile, in a intelligent interview with Maureen Freely - although with some ridiculous editorial censorship imposed upon an extract from *The Good Times* - and published in *The Daily Telegraph* on 11 July 1998, Kelman seems intent upon rousing what Banks dubs the 'more constipated reviewers.' In the interview he attacks the attitude of the "establishment" which, he argues, is offended by his writings because he represents a working-class culture whose expected role 'is to be silent.' Kelman

continues with a parody of the attitude of the “establishment” toward the working class:

You're too uppity, that is the problem, it's like, you know OK, we're not kicking you in the mouth, so why are you not grateful? Why do you still want to be out in the gutter? Or, OK, I'm not kicking you in the mouth, why are you singing a song? Why are we still aware of your existence?

Freely argues that the “establishment” is right to think of his work as a deliberate affront because, in an interesting interpretation, she suggests that Kelman is not so much attacking the Anglo-American [literary] tradition as bypassing it' in favour of a 'much more ambitious, overly European project to turn a “tiny linguistic island” into a fictitious world so luminous that it can command a world audience.'

Appendix A: Ideology: Some Definitions

As a term, Ideology is bound up with wide ranging debates about social structure, human action and choice, as well as the function and objectives of Marxism in the contemporary period. Despite these potential complexities I believe that ideology has an important explanatory role in literary study, particularly in explaining social or cultural judgement. In this Appendix I discuss the concept and offer some definitions which are influenced by the writings of Marx, Gramsci, Williams and Eagleton. The following is designed to be read alongside Chapter Three and complement my analysis of how critics have received novels by Kelman and Banks.

It is not my intention here to offer a thoroughgoing survey of Marxist literary theory. Mulhern provides an eloquent overview of the main developments of Marxist thought as they pertain to literary theory and I shall draw on his account to anchor what immediately follows. One principal problem with any practical application of Marxist theory lies in the sheer size of the tradition. Marxist thought on culture, literature, and aesthetics is a vast domain. Pawler devotes over five-hundred pages to an assessment of the role of literature within Marx's own writings. In conclusion he comments:

Marx never makes mechanical and rigid use of the base-superstructure model and it does not in fact figure at all prominently in his appreciations of existing literary works.¹

This cannot be emphasised enough. Neither Marx nor Engels developed a specific theory of literature. Marxists writing after their deaths, have had to locate assessments of literature, culture and aesthetics - and frequently the relationship between the three - in general Marxist models of the relationship between social structure and economic structure. Either this, or seize upon Marx's scattered comments upon literature, frequently used by him to illustrate his broader arguments, and develop these into theories of literature. Both approaches potentially create problems. Analysing literature from within a broad socio-economic framework carries the risk of failing to

account for the specific social effects, practices and aesthetic effects which literary forms manifest and rely upon. It can potentially reduce literary works to the economics of publishing or arguments about the viewpoint of the bourgeoisie. As Pawler rightly emphasises, Marx himself avoided such an over-simplified view. Cherry-picking Marxist concepts carries the opposite danger. As was shown in Chapter One and by reference to Easthope, this led to incoherence and muddle.

Following Mulhern, I argue that Marxism should be seen as a perspective rather than a theory. If this perspective can be summed up succinctly at all, it is by Engels when he refers to historical materialism and which:

designates the view of the course of history which seeks the ultimate cause and the great moving power of all important historic events in the economic development of society, in the changes in the mode of production and exchange, in the consequent division of society into distinct classes, and in the struggle of these classes against one another.²

This definition of historical materialism is close to that expounded by Marx in his introduction to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* where he argues that the economic structure of society, constituted by its relations of production, is the foundation of societies throughout history. In this passage lies the origin of the now famous 'base', 'superstructure' division which has been seen as fundamental to Marxism.³ Shaw, incisively, argues that historical materialism should not be regarded as a philosophy but as an empirical perspective: a way of interpreting social and historical enquiry. This is perfectly correct. Marx and Engels were at pains to emphasise that the value of their approach lay in its ability to avoid philosophical abstractions and dogmas and explain the appearance and development of capitalism. Shaw comments:

A theory which makes such bold claims about the nature of history and society can be vindicated, if at all, only by its ability to provide a viable research programme for social and historical investigations.⁴

This is central to my methodological and theoretical attitude towards a Marxist perspective. Such an approach carefully avoids the twin dangers of theoretical abstraction, or shallow, inflexible dogma. As regards the latter danger, Marx's comments on literature show that such brutalism, whatever its source, is thoroughly un-Marxist.

Methodologically, this opens up the way for two distinct approaches. The first is within the general perspective of historical materialism as described above. The second involves constantly reassessing key Marxist concepts such as class and ideology and how they might pertain to literature or other cultural forms, in the light of ongoing developments within capitalist societies. Contemporary Marxists such as Mulhern have provided a basis for this second perspective. On the subject of class he argues:

If the problematic of class remains crucial for Marxists, this is not out of a hidebound devotion to an old cause but because of the fundamental thesis that in the over determined totality of social life, the dominant mode of production plays a decisive structuring role.⁵

In short, class still acts as the decisive marker of social identity in capitalist societies, because classes are still the fundamental social groupings thrown up by capitalist societies. But as Mulhern points out, this does not mean that class is any more 'essential' as a definition of social being than race or gender. It simply means that Marxism is uniquely placed to theorise and offer a perspective on how contemporary capitalist societies construct and create class as a core social identity. Such a negotiation avoids the potential criticism that Marxism has stubbornly stuck to old-fashioned concepts. It also, of course, highlights the question of why critics of Marxism consider social class to be an outdated or rather unfashionable concept when in contemporary Britain perceptions of class and of conflicts between classes are still widespread.⁶ From the vantage of this Marxist perspective what can be said for class can also be said about ideology: and of the specific question as to whether literary judgments are impregnated with ideology. This is what concerns the rest of this chapter.

Eagleton, in the conclusion to his book on the history of the concept within Marxist thinking, argues that the concept has a unique and valuable role when it:

...aims to disclose something of the relation between an utterance and its material conditions of possibility, when those conditions of possibility are viewed in the light of certain power-struggles central to the reproduction (or also, for some theories, contestation) of a whole form of social life. ⁷

Seen from this perspective, ideology describes the relationship between ideas and the material interests of those who circulate ideas. This is a fundamentally Marxist approach to ideology which seeks to identify the relationship between specific cultural or social judgments and the forces of economic or social interest that they serve. Nevertheless Ideology has proved to be a difficult, much contested term within Marxism. As Williams, as well as Mulhern point out, two competing - and not necessarily exclusive - conceptions of ideology exist within Marxism itself. The first emphasises ideology as a sense of deception. This can be found within *The German Ideology* where Marx and Engels describe ideology as a form of 'false consciousness', a term first coined far later by Engels:

If in all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside down as in a camera obscura, this phenomena arises just as much as from their historical life process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life process. ⁸

Ideology here is defined as referring to a form of distortion, a mistaken way of seeing reality. In *The German Ideology* Marx and Engels use this definition of ideology to attack the notion that ideas motor history. They describe such a view as 'the idealistic view of history,' and use their definition of ideology as a pejorative tool with which to reveal the 'real' social basis behind such idealistic distortions. This is exactly why they deploy the metaphor of camera obscura with its implication of inversion. The polemical dimensions of *The German Ideology* are expressed in the text's Preface where Marx and Engels declare, 'Let us revolt against the rule of ideas.'⁹ They promote the thesis that such ideological distortions

arise from a fundamental division of labour between intellectual and material activity.

Later, in his Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx seems to convey a different sense of ideology. This second, more neutral, definition can be seen within another famous passage in which he expounds his commitment to a materialistic perspective on history. Speaking of his study of the relationship between 'economic foundations' and 'transformations in the whole immense superstructure' he argues that:

In studying such transformations it is always necessary to distinguish between the material transformations of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science and the legal, political, religious, artistic or philosophic - in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out.¹⁰

This definition provides a limited autonomy to ideology. Here ideology does not simply reflect changes within material conditions - does not, mechanistically, always express the view of the ruling class. Rather, ideologies are described as doing battle when relations of production alter and the social power of classes alter with them. According to this model, they can also lag behind, or jump ahead of, changes within the mode and means of production because it can take time for consciousness of these changes to filter through to potential protagonists in class struggle or, alternatively, because a class can anticipate its future ascendancy and begin to deploy its ideologies in preparation for its rise to power. Also, in this second definition, ideology is described as a conceptual shorthand for two distinct phenomena. Ideologies express shifts in the economic conditions of production as well as representing the different and, as Marx implies, frequently conflicting, world views of social groups who are dependent upon different areas within the prevailing capitalist mode of production.

Marx indicates that a quite different, far more subtle and less empirical, methodology is required for study of these ideological forms of conflict

which arise from shifts within the economic base of a society. He argues that economic transformations can be determined with some degree of empirical precision, whereas, and by contrast, ideological struggles have to be 'distinguished' implicitly because they cannot be solely understood by application of empirical methods.

At first sight, it might seem that these two definitions are exclusive: that ideology cannot refer to both a generalised distortion of reality as well as the pluralised, far more complex and differentiated model of the second definition. Some Marxists have held to this view but my argument, brief as it must be in light of such an extensive and complex debate, is that upholding this division is unproductive. In the 'reconstructed' 1970 edition of *The German Ideology* Marx and Engels use the singular ideology: 'if in all ideology men and their circumstances...' a pejorative usage, which as Williams notes, has been dominant since the appearance of the word in the late eighteenth-century.¹¹ This is a usage which readers of *The German Ideology* would have easily understood, and given that this text was also an extended polemic against the Young Hegelians, it is not unreasonable to deduce that Marx and Engels's use of ideology in *The German Ideology* might have borne the imprint of their polemical goal.

Larrain alters, as well as in some senses extends, my interpretation when he argues that the pejorative use of ideology in *The German Ideology* is indicative of a specific, more general, negative use of ideology which can be detected throughout texts written by Marx and Engels. He comments:

The relationship between ideological and non-ideological ideas cannot be interpreted as the general relationship between error and truth. Ideological distortions cannot be overcome by criticism, they can disappear only when the contradictions which give rise to them are practically resolved.¹²

Ideology then, according to this account, is a by-product of these social and economic contradictions: a flawed way of expressing such insoluble contradictions through words alone - and therefore necessarily negative.

This analysis is borne out by reference to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* a text which, as I have said, is usually understood as supporting a more neutral definition of ideology than *The German Ideology*. In a section entitled 'Theories of the Medium of Circulation and of Money', Marx outlines how eighteenth-century monetary theory was ideologically deformed by its hidden struggle against the Monetary System:

Just as the palaeontological theories of the eighteenth century inevitably contain an undercurrent which arises from a critical or an apologetic consideration of the biblical tradition of the Deluge, so behind the facade of all monetary theories of the eighteenth century a hidden struggle is waged against the Monetary System, the spectre which stood guard over the cradle of bourgeois economy and still casts its heavy shadow over legislation. ¹³

Marx argues that this struggle 'prevented Adam Smith from objectively analysing the phenomena of metallic currency,' and here Marx is underscoring how ideology can prevent accurate analysis of part of an economic system, preventing objective consideration of an economic system because the very ruling ideas and theories within any era are involved within the actual power struggles of the dominant class. Within this model of ideology Marx argues that ideas themselves simply cannot transcend the material or social contradictions from which they originate. Such an understanding of ideology also re-emphasises the nexus between language and the mode and means of production in any historical era. In *The German Ideology* Marx and Engels underline this connection by arguing that language is irreducibly social as well as practical; 'language is practical consciousness,' - a requirement of the need to enter into social relations with other humans.¹⁴

As Larrain admits, his interpretation casts doubt on the validity of several productive Marxist accounts of ideology written after the death of Marx and Engels and which have not taken the more limited, negative, view of ideology which he discerns.¹⁵ At issue here is a broader question than whether such writers - Antonio Gramsci among them - are mistaken with

their more positive, plural reading of ideology than otherwise seems to be supported by the writings of Marx and Engels themselves. The fundamental issue revolves around the problem of whether Marx's and Engels's writings should be subject to continual revision, and if so, how far such revision might proceed without losing their central theoretical insights, as well as Marxism's coherence as a practical political movement. Some contemporary Marxists worry about the implications of this dilemma. Harris in his account of Marx's writing of *Capital* for example, stresses the active political function of the text and suggests that a distance might have emerged between the present-day consumption of the text and its past readers:

Although *Capital* is often seen now as an academic text to be picked over by intellectuals, or as a source of dogma for the propagandists of former communist regimes, its greatest strength is that for more than a century it has been read and reflected upon by generations of working people in the vanguard of struggles for socialism.¹⁶

This potential ossification of Marxism into simply another 'radical' theory studied by intellectuals has a key relationship with the concept of ideology. In so far as ideology, together with other central concepts within Marxism such as class, can help to generate new and detailed understandings of developments within contemporary society and therefore have a unique contribution to intellectual study and research.

This is the point at which the debate over Marx and Engels's use of ideology can be resolved. The debate needs to turn away from a potentially obsessive consideration of what Marx and Engels precisely meant by their use of ideology in any specific text, to a consideration of whether ideology can be productively applied to areas of research. I believe that the generally restricted definition of ideology in Marx and Engels's texts, and as identified by Larrain, is lacking. This is not because Larrain has misinterpreted this generally restricted use of ideology, but because such a restricted model of ideology has to be revised in order to analyse the increasing complexity of contemporary western societies.

Considerable headway has been made by Terry Eagleton in this respect with his book, *An Introduction to Ideology*. Eagleton is careful to avoid two problems which have plagued influential definitions of ideology after Marx's death. The first is typified by the theories of Louis Althusser, where a dominant ideology is relayed through 'Ideological State Apparatuses,' and holds everything and everyone, in a rigid grip. This fails to account for either cultural or political struggle, and Althusser's definition of ideology has been rightly criticised for its inflexibility and political pessimism. Novels by Kelman or Banks could hardly be said to be supportive of any dominant ideology if this is defined as some omnipotent, seamless force, yet as I have also shown, novels by Kelman do represent a social structure in which resistance to political, cultural and economic domination is increasingly marginalised. With characters such as Hines in *A Busconductor Hines*, Doyle in *A Disaffection*, or Sammy in *How Late It Was, How Late*, resistance is confined to the deviant, spontaneous, acts of rebellion; or an inner polemic against 'the powers that be'. It would be wrong, therefore, to dismiss any theoretical model which accommodates the psychic and institutional dimensions of ideologies.

At the other pole, and sometimes in reaction to potentially negative definitions of ideology like those propounded by Althusser, ideology has been claimed to simply describe the beliefs of different groups within a society. As Eagleton contends, such a wide definition of the concept is unworkable and worthless because it fails to take account of the unequal distribution of power in capitalist societies. Consequently, ideology, within this general definition, tends to stand just for powerful ideas; it loses its unique ability as a concept with which to describe the relationship between dominant ideas and dominant social or economic interests. As was noted earlier, despite the difficulties within Marx and Engels's original conceptions of ideology, both writers struggled towards a definition of ideology which emphasises the relationship between the material interests of a class and particular forms of belief.

Once again, novels by Kelman and Banks do not support a politically castrated general concept of ideology either. For example Andy, a central character of *Complicity*, is used by Banks to underline the relationship

between dominant ideas and vested forms of political and economic power. Indeed, the novel as a whole indicates the subversion of any real democracy in contemporary Britain because of the structural inequalities of capitalist society itself.

In the face of this potential theoretical mis-connection between ideologies and class economic interests, Eagleton inserts a dynamic, mediated, model. He argues that 'ideology is a site of contestation and negotiation,' where, 'there is a constant busy traffic: meanings and values are stolen, transformed, appropriated across the frontiers of different classes and groups, surrendered, repossessed, reinflected.' He sums up the dynamic nature of this model by arguing that, 'There is no neat, one-to-one, correspondence between classes and ideologies.' ¹⁷

This is a significant point. If, as Eagleton argues, no such simple connections exist, then any radical Marxist account cannot simply 'read' off the connections between an ideology expressed within a novel and the material interests of a class or class-fraction which this ideology might seem to belong to. At first sight, this might seem to preclude the possibility of ever understanding the relationship between cultural power and economic or social interests. This is not the case, and Eagleton is not seeking to disable this key tool within a Marxist armoury. An emphasis upon of the complex, unstable, conjunction between ideologies and social interest is used to add a degree of flexibility into his account. Indeed, just ten pages further on and the theoretical basis for such a move becomes obvious to readers. He praises the contribution that the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci has made to understanding ideology, particularly Gramsci's concept of hegemony, and comments:

If the concept of hegemony extends and enriches the notion of ideology, it also lends this somewhat abstract term a material body and political cutting edge. It is with Gramsci that the crucial transition is effected from ideology as 'systems of ideas' to ideology as lived, habitual social practice. ¹⁸

Gramsci's thought on ideology has been at the centre of several debates within Marxism, as well as the wider field of cultural studies. Eagleton's *Introduction to Ideology* is a good example of how Gramsci has influenced current Marxist theory. Eagleton's book has two intertwined purposes. Its first, less obvious, purpose is a guide for readers through the history of the concept within Marxist thinking; the second, very prominent, role is a rejection of post-structuralist and post-modern theory and which I outlined in Chapter One. Recommending Gramsci's concept of hegemony to readers as an example of a powerful, but flexible, addition to the notion of ideology is clearly meant to complement a philosophical rebuttal of 'the writings of post-modernism and post-structuralism,' where, Eagleton argues, 'the very notion of ideology,' has disappeared.¹⁹

I will turn to an extended consideration and application of Gramsci's theories later, but first I want to prepare the ground by outlining a workable definition of ideology. My definition has five central points, which ascend in order of generality.

A Definition Of Ideology

1. The term ideology, is a general concept. As a concept, its analytical purchase resides in describing the way in which social or/and economic interests bury themselves within social practices, perception and language.
2. Ideologies exist in groupings. They have important, if sometimes complex, interrelationships. Hall for example, in his analysis of Thatcherism, identifies the mission of Thatcherism to 'reconstruct' and cement previously separate ideologies within the Conservative party into a new pragmatic 'ideological bloc' which was capable of transforming the 'ideologies of the Keynesian state.'²⁰ As I demonstrated during Chapter One, in the hands of such conservative literary critics as Harold Bloom, a pathos-saturated pessimism about the future of literature supports arguments about the need for a return to far more elitist, non-commercial

criteria of discrimination. A pessimistic ideology (things are not what they used to be...) is therefore used to reinforce the appeal of an elitist ideology to readers of *The Western Canon*.

3. As 2 strongly implies, ideologies can also struggle against each other for ascendancy. It is also the case that individual ideologies or 'ideological blocs' can themselves be fissured by internal conflicts. Ideologies can be scarred both by inner conflicts as well as struggles against each other. These scars and fissures can result from the economic contradictions which are, as Marx argues in his *Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy*, insolvable by debate and the operation of ideologies alone. As he contends with reference to monetary theory in the eighteenth-century, 'The tension caused by the struggle against the illusions of the mercantile system moreover prevented Adam Smith from objectively analysing the phenomena of metallic currency.'²¹ Or, they can result from ongoing power-struggles between social groups for control of a socially or economically advantageous domain.

4. As 2 and 3 demonstrate, ideologies operate within and to some extent through institutions and social practices. This was also an essential component of my general definition of ideology contained within point 1. It is via these practices, and within these institutions, that ideologies are confirmed or disputed; this is the sense in which they are 'lived'. In the case of 3 and Hall's example of the Conservative Party, the institutions in which the Thatcherite ideological bloc expressed its 'mission' were those of British Parliamentary democracy, principally embodied by the House of Commons. As Hall notes the House of Commons, together with the 'mass tabloid press'²² became part of the public domain from which 'Mrs Thatcher emerged as the public figure best able to translate the high nostrums of monetarism and the gospel of the free market into the homespun idioms of the Tory household.'²³ Indeed as he points out, it was also the historical peculiarities of the British electoral system which helped the Thatcherite ideological bloc form an administration when it retained the support of 'somewhat less than a majority of the British electorate.'²⁴ This is a good example of the importance, as well as complexity, which an emphasis upon

institutions and practice gives to an actual analysis of ideologies. As an institution the House of Commons, for example, has its own particular practices - as defined by its procedures (e.g. the annual opening of Parliament by the reigning British Monarch, voting by the lobby system) as well as ideologies which are saturated within, and symbolised by, the very institution itself, and which go much deeper. For example, someone living in contemporary Northern Ireland can react with awe and reverence at the symbolic authority embodied in the Commons and perceive it as the very embodiment of the indissoluble Union of the United Kingdom. The Houses of Commons, in this first hypothetical case, then connects with a number of ideologies: nationalism, conservatism, Unionism. They can also, of course, perceive the institution as a sham dedicated to legitimising British Imperialism and foiling what a portion of the population of Northern Ireland regards as the rightful unification of Ireland. In this second case, the aura of legal-democratic authority radiated by the Commons is resisted by recourse to a version of Irish nationalism.

5. Ideologies work through persuasion and consent as well as domination. In my introduction this was the dimension which E. P. Thompson refers to when he recommended that Marxist accounts needed to study the 'structure of power relations through symbolism,' to a far greater extent than previously.²⁵ Accounting for the symbolic dimensions and psychic elements of ideologies is crucial because it is through these aspects that ideologies perform much of their work, and it is through lived, everyday, practices across the social sphere that ideologies are accepted, or resisted. What comes to be held as normal, natural, proper, reasonable, realistic, democratic or alternatively, deviant, unnatural, improper, utopian, or undemocratic is cemented via the psychic and symbolic elements of ideologies. Here is where the notion of hegemony becomes extremely productive.

Gramsci developed the concept of hegemony as a response to the observation that modern bourgeois states did not rule through force alone, but rather by persuasion, exerting a moral and intellectual leadership, and making limited compromises with key social groups. For example, in his

Prison Notebooks and in relation to the question of how the school/education is linked to the state, Gramsci argues against the 'orthodox' Marxist/communist view that the bourgeoisie, being the dominant class, dominates education and other areas over which the state has sovereignty. He points out 'It cannot even in all honesty be claimed that the bourgeois class moulds the school to its own ends of domination.'²⁶ Rather he argues that while 'the bourgeoisie is the class which controls the state,' it purposely 'lets the bureaucrats make or destroy,' schools 'as they are able and allows the education ministers to be chosen according to the caprice of political competition.'²⁷ The political class, political parties, and state bureaucracy are, according to this account, given free reign within education. Further, Gramsci suggests that successful individuals or groups within the state bureaucracy and political world are rewarded with ministerial appointment and a share of power. He caustically comments 'Ministers of education are placed in office because they belong to a political party, not because they know how to administer and direct the educational function of the state.'²⁸ Patronage, negotiation, persuasion, accommodation and limited power-sharing are, Gramsci indicates, the tools that allow a dominant class, with help from its cronies and allies, to dominate the social, cultural and economic fields. What Gramsci calls the 'dominant historical bloc', that is the dominant class and its allies, maintains its hegemony within the cultural, economic and social spheres via a web of social institutions, dominant ideas and practices. Hegemony, as Gramsci emphasises, is never total nor static; it constantly has to legitimise its dominance. In a capitalist society hegemony must legitimise, and rationalise the unequal distribution of power.

Raymond Williams captures the complexity of this interaction between institutions, social practices and dominant ideologies with his discussion of Antonio Gramsci's model of hegemony, and of how education might figure in such a model. He has argued that 'The educational institutions are usually the main agencies of the transmission of an effective dominant culture and this is now a major economic as well as cultural activity; indeed it is both in the same moment' and continues:

Moreover, at a philosophical level, at the true level of theory and

at the level of the history of various practices, there is a process which I call the selective tradition: that which, within the terms of the dominant culture is always passed off as 'the tradition', 'the significant past'.²⁹

Recognising this lived element of ideology is crucial, because as Williams indicates, it is only through an emphasis on the lived, dynamic, flexible, dimensions of ideologies that the operation of complex, contemporary societies can be accounted for. I agree. It is simply not the case that contemporary western societies are held together through naked ruling-class domination and state coercion. If this were the case there would be no need for the constant institutional reproduction of a dominant ideology. Hegemonic social groups would not have needed to create such ideological notions as 'the significant past' or a 'selective tradition' because the indoctrinated populace would simply adhere to the ideological line. Williams makes this argument about the education system when he comments 'If what we learn there were merely an imposed ideology ...it would be - and one would be glad - a very much easier thing to overthrow.'³⁰

This Appendix has emphasised that the key problem with ideology lies in applying it productively. As I have argued, one way around this problem is to jettison any notion that ideology can be properly discerned without applying the concept to specific areas of research - it is only in this way that the operation of specific ideologies can be detected and analysed. The judgements of literary critics and process of critical reception are two ideal areas in this respect.

Literary critics circulate ideas through the commercial media. As such they figure as institutional figures who have a commercial as well as more purely cultural role. Bowlby, describes them as 'cultural gatekeepers', a phrase which implies their institutional power to police the interpretation of the arts through reviews and articles.³¹ Literary critics act as institutional intermediaries who sift and decode the mass of novels (as well as plays and poems) which are published every year in Britain for readers of the newspapers or literary magazines for which they work. This practice as

Dipple notes, has historically led to occasional conflict between novelists and literary critics over interpretation, a situation in which authorial authority and critical authority are mobilised against each other, each trying to capture the attention of readers, and establish the 'definitive' interpretation.³²

Kelman's personal interventions over the critical reception given to his novels needs to be seen as a recent example of this conflict. As I demonstrated in Chapter Three, he has been vociferous and able in inserting a radical political agenda into the critical reception given to his novels, and this is an instance in which an author contests critic's judgements. Kelman has also made some scathing points about the criteria which literary critics and reviewers use. This raises the potentially difficult question of how the structural (commercial, institutional, cultural) position of literary critics and literary reviewers relates to their professional assessments.

Gramsci's writings are ideal here because he was particularly concerned with the cultural-political function of the press and especially that of the literary or cultural critic. Given his own background this is hardly surprising. In Italy's pre-fascist period he had pursued a career as a journalist in Turin and had written extensively for the Turin socialist weekly *Avanti!*³³ His *Prison Notebooks* contain a section specifically concerned with journalism in which he sets out a detailed plan for the organisation of a future Communist press. In this section of his *Prison Notebooks*, he also analyses the political-cultural function of the bourgeois press in relation to his wider emphasis on hegemony and I use his insights in the second half of Chapter Three.

Endnotes

- 1 S.S. Pawler, *Karl Marx and World Literature* (London: OUP, 1976), p 412.
- 2 Friedrich Engels, Introduction, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, quoted in, William H. Shaw, 'Historical Materialism', *A Dictionary Of Marxist Thought*, eds. Tom Bottomore et al. 2nd ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), p. 234.
- 3 Marx, *Contribution*, p. 29.
- 4 William H. Shaw, 'Historical Materialism', *A Dictionary Of Marxist Thought*, eds. Tom Bottomore et al. 2nd ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), p. 235.
- 5 Mulhern, 'Introduction', p. 26.
- 6 Michael Argyle, *The Psychology Of Social Class* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 10.
- 7 Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 223.
- 8 Marx, *Ideology*, p. 47.
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- 13 Marx, *Contribution*, p. 168 - 169.
- 14 Marx, *Ideology*, p. 51.
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- 16 Laurence Harris, 'Capital (Das Kapital)', *A Dictionary Of Marxist Thought*, eds. Tom Bottomore et al. 2 ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), p. 68.
- 17 Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 102.
- 18 Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 115.
- 19 Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. xi.
- 20 Stuart Hall, 'The Toad In The Garden: Thatcherism Among The Theorists', *Marxism and The Interpretation Of Culture*, eds. Lawrence Grossberg and C. Nelson (London: Macmillan, 1988), p. 45.
- 21 Marx, *Contribution*, p. 168.
- 22 Stuart Hall, 'The Toad In The Garden: Thatcherism Among The Theorists', *Marxism and The Interpretation Of Culture*, eds. Lawrence Grossberg and C. Nelson (London: Macmillan, 1988), p.46.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p. 37.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p.38.
- 25 E. P. Thompson, 'Agenda For Radical History', *Critical Enquiry*, Winter 1995, Vol. 21, No. 2: p. 303.
- 26 Gramsci, p.39.
- 27 Gramsci, p. 40.
- 28 Gramsci, p. 39.

- 29 Raymond Williams *Problems in Materialism and culture*, (London: Verso 1980), p.38.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Rachel Bowlby, *Shopping With Freud* (London/New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 4.
- 32 Elizabeth Dipple, *The Unresolvable Plot* (London/New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 4.
- 33 Gramsci, p. 386.

Appendix B: The British Reading-Public

The way in which consumption, generally, intersects with social class has not been lost on contemporary British novelists. It is a central reoccurring concern of novels published during the period. In *Downriver* by Ian Sinclair the political ineffectuality of the British intelligentsia during the 1980s, is underscored by a description of how:

Exquisitely made-up young ladies tottered out on Saturday mornings to hawk the *Socialist Worker*, for an hour outside Sainsbury's. Duty done, they nipped inside to stock up on pate, gruyere, olives, French bread and a Frascati for an alfresco committee meeting. (p. 73)

Sinclair's novel attacks the hypocrisy of the bourgeois British intelligentsia, but it is significant that it does so through what they buy. As I set out in Chapter Two, one of the chief hallmarks of Kelman's fiction is the extent to which its characters are shown to have their consumption radically curtailed by the relative poverty in which they live. They are defined in antithesis to the consumer culture of contemporary dominant society and Kelman indicates that this is one of the ways in which lower working class social identity is currently produced outside dominant bourgeois society. In *A Disaffection*, Doyle visits his unemployed brother Gavin, and Arthur, one of Gavin's friends, describes how the a mutual friend has 'made it':

Freddie Sweeney from Gilshie Hill, said Arthur, he's working out Duntocher way and he's making a fortune. Ye want to see his inside the cunt's house! Me and Maureen were visiting a a couple of months back; it's a fucking palace. Videos and hi-fi and all new furniture, ye want to see it! (p. 261)

The bitter irony is that such trappings of material success merely serve to create envy and feelings of despondency among the unemployed working-class during a period in which, and as Gavin puts it, 'More than half of Scotland's no got a job.' Freddie Sweeney's affluence becomes a kind of

urban myth which stands as a kind of unattainable symbol for the long-term unemployed like Gavin. Doyle's visit to a shop near the scheme where Gavin lives, underscores the way in which deprivation informs what is an architecture of consumer poverty. This architecture can be seen in the shop's design, with its 'chicken net' wire protecting the stock from shoplifters and payment made through a grille (p. 256). Recognition of his own charmed financial status is also what drives the socialist conscience of Weir in *Espedair Street*.

Weir realises that he is the ultimate consumer who could if necessary 'buy a nearly-new Boeing 747 for cash' if he so desired (p. 101). But Weir describes how his whole working-class psychology is antithetical to the organised bourgeois psychology which complements consumer society. Despite his riches Weir, so the narrative implies, still thinks with a working-class attitude to money. This is conveyed by Weir's self-deprecating description of how his attitude to money is defined by what's in his pocket at any one time. He informs readers:

The record company gave me a Gucci wallet, but I'd still stuff pounds and fivers into various pockets - I'd even cram them into the pocket where I'd put my wallet, absently wondering why it was so difficult to squeeze the crumpled bits of paper in there.
(p. 7)

Weir is a critical and marginalised observer of contemporary consumer society, and points out how his working-class background has left deep formative marks on his own self-perception such as preferring the 'pie chips and beans' in a local pub to a '...five star steak au poivre with fennel, asparagus, courgettes and new potatoes,' in one of Glasgow's leading restaurants (p. 39).

In Ian McEwan's novel, *The Child In Time*, its omniscient narrative also indicates how consumption is traversed by stark class-affiliations. It describes how: 'The people who used the supermarket divided into two groups as distinct as tribes or nations. The first lived locally in modernised Victorian terraced houses which they owned. The second lived locally in

tower blocks and council estates' (p. 15). McEwan's novel goes on to underline how purchases at the local supermarket conforms to these class affiliations and divisions:

Those in the first group tended to buy fresh fruit and vegetables, brown bread coffee beans, fresh fish from a special counter, wines and spirits, while those in the second group bought tinned or frozen vegetables, baked beans, instant soup, white sugar, cupcakes, beer, spirits and cigarettes. (p. 15)

Consumption here stands as a guide to, as well as confirmation of, class-identity, and it is significant that McEwan designs the narrative so that it avoids explicitly referring to class. Through absence, the narrative underscores the reader's tacit assumptions about the social class of the two groups described via their consumption at the supermarket. The implication disclosed here of course, is that readers are also aware of connections between what people buy and their class, and that they too can 'read' this relationship.

This has a bearing on Billington's account where she argues in favour of an approach which 'reconciles the dimensions of culture as a *structure* that individuals are born into and culture as a *process* which they create and recreate',¹ because the way in which consumption is articulated and processed within social class is shown to be crucial to the way in which class is experienced, reproduced, or resisted by individuals. This is common to all the contemporary novels which I have mentioned in this chapter. Commodity relations are shown to provide a structural framework within contemporary British society for the process by which class is created and recreated at an individual, everyday level. In light of this finding, and of Kelman's aim to produce a novel which addresses 'ordinary men and women', outlined in Chapter Three, I suggest that the most productive and pertinent issue disclosed by this perspective is created by turning the question 'inward' and by asking about the social class of the British book-buying public.

This also fits in with an account of publishing and bookselling during the

period, because one important development within both industries during the 1980s was their increased investment in monitoring and identifying the book-buying consumer. Bodies like Book Marketing Limited, were set up to take advantage of these new attitudes by those involved in publishing and selling books, and were at the forefront of the more competitive attitudes which became increasingly prominent since 1979.

Feather comments that 'the publishing industry has begun to analyse its markets more closely' and places these changes within a historical context by arguing that, 'As a result, we have a clearer picture of the British reading public in the decades after World War II than at any previous time in history.' Significantly, Feather adds, 'These findings can be very briefly summarised: British book readers are predominantly middle-class and well educated, which in itself is hardly surprising.'² Gabriel and Lang, make the useful argument that identity as a consumer does not nullify other frameworks of social organisation such as gender, class, or race. They comment, 'Being a consumer dissolves neither class membership nor citizenship; it is not the case that one moment we act as consumers and the next as workers or as citizens, as women or men or as members of ethnic groups.' And add, 'We are creative composites of several social categories at the same time.'³

Their final comment is extremely important because it points to the way in which consumption is criss-crossed by these lines of social affiliation and is stratified by them. This approach also fits it with that offered by Hoggart, when he emphasises how patterns of cultural consumption are subtly articulated within class cultures and sub-culture.⁴ It also offers the potential of understanding how gradations of socioeconomic distinction are reproduced through patterns and practices of cultural consumption, thereby creating the association, for example, between the educated middle-class reader and between contemporary 'literary' novels. As I set out in Chapters Two and Three, this connection is central to an understanding of novels by Kelman and Banks. It has been essential to the way in which they have represented class within their novels, and why Kelman conceives of an 'everyday' literary novel which bypasses this connection between 'quality' literary fiction and the middle-classes. This connection is also the target for

some biting satire in *Walking On Glass* and can be seen as a significant part of the political basis for Banks's approach to genre.

Hamilton, in his survey of fastselling fiction for 1993, notes that for the first time since 1979 the number of paperbacks selling over 100 thousand copies by the end of the calendar year dipped below 102.5 This is significant because, as Handy, and Gabriel and Lang both note, the recession of the early 1990s was different to that of the early 1980s, because it affected middle-class groups which had 'rarely experienced the reality, or even threat, of unemployment in recent times.'⁶ This is the first piece of evidence to indicate that middle-class consumers are central to the British book market.

The 1995 B.M.L. report and a M.O.R.I. poll commissioned by the B.B.C. and Arts Council for the television programme *Bookworm*, both identify a numerically small group of book consumers who are enthusiastic about reading. The B.M.L. report identifies a group of dedicated buyers who make up some 40% of buyers overall but who purchase 80% of all books sold annually.⁷ It also identifies a group within this group, and in line with previous B.M.L. research, who make up just 7% of all customers annually, but who account for a third of all purchases by volume. It calls this second group 'Megabuyers'. The M.O.R.I. poll also identified a group of 'core' readers who are keen within their particular area of interest. Reviewing the poll, *The Guardian* commented, 'Once a reader takes a liking to an author or a subject he is likely to be hooked.'⁸

This fits in well with the conservative attitudes of the British book-buying public noted by Hamilton in his survey of fastsellers.⁹ It also indicates that authorship and genre are, in a general sense, extremely powerful mechanisms within contemporary literary culture: the bread and butter of the fiction trade, as well as central to the way in which readers perceive contemporary fiction and consequently the way in which they evaluate contemporary novels in terms of structure, style, meaning, and pleasure. Jackson, argues for a more explanatory and pragmatic approach to literary study¹⁰ and this is supported by my own approach. Furthermore, this finding

reflects back into Chapter Four of my study, where I focused on how publishers and booksellers organised, or reorganised, concepts of authorship, format, and genre during a period marked by their structural reorganisation and when facing increasing commercial pressures.

Although, there is not necessarily a correspondence between the reader parameter used by the M.O.R.I. poll and the consumer parameter used by B.M.L. research, the latter proffers the view that there is a correlation between readers and buyers. For example, B.M.L. research points out that the heaviest library users are also the heaviest book buyers. The report finds that only some 8% of adults own a ticket for a public library but do not buy books.¹¹ This suggests that the 'British book buying public' is a fairly coherent and stable group of consumers which, consequently, can be identified and analysed. It also suggests that the division between the book-buying public and the reading public is insignificant in a practical sense: people who buy books are also, largely, the same people who borrow books from public libraries.

What is most revealing is the B.M.L. report's social profile of the book-buying public. It uses a class scale which is similar, though not identical, to the official Registrar General's system of social classification. The market research scale used by the report has six classes:

Class A:

Those in higher managerial, executive and professional occupations farmers with farms over five-hundred acres, senior officers in the Armed forces.

Class B:

Middle-range managerial, executive and professional occupations, including teachers, G.P's and farmers with farms of between one hundred and five hundred acres.

Class C1:

Junior managers and executive officers, small businessmen and shop keepers, clerks and salesmen.

Class C2:

All skilled manual occupations and some lower-grade white-collar jobs such as shop assistants and typists.

Class D:

Unskilled manual occupations.

Class E:

Those with no earning capacity, including old age pensioners, invalids and the unemployed.¹²

As Bradley points out in his accessible analysis of the contemporary British middle-class, the market research class scale is based largely, like the Registrar General's system, in terms of occupation. He argues, cogently, that the system has an advantage over other more complex systems of class stratification because occupation is 'probably the most common single factor in which ordinary people base distinctions of class,' and provides evidence to support this claim.¹³ In his analysis of the commercial system, Bradley also makes a more general class distinction between C1 and C2, arguing that classes A, B, and C1 comprise that broad grouping 'the middle classes.' and C2, D and E the working classes. Correspondingly, he argues that 'if the C1/C2 division is taken as marking the dividing line between the classes an analysis by the Institute of Practitioners In Advertising of the United Kingdom population in 1980 put 38 per cent in the middle classes and 62 per cent in the working classes'.¹⁴

I accept Bradley's distinction between the working classes and the middle classes. There is considerable debate in sociology about the usefulness of class as a mode of analysis as well as arguments that the middle class has structurally changed in the post-war period. I do not accept that class has evaporated. As I argued in Chapter Five novels by Kelman indicate that the working class become divided rather than disappeared altogether. Banks's novels similarly, point to the way in which social class is still central to British society.

One key advantage of Bradley's division is the extent to which it keys in with the 1995 B.M.L. Summary Report. The B.M.L. publishes yearly reports based on '1,800 interviews with adults aged 15+,' and its yearly reports aim to 'help subscribing companies to plan strategically and to target publishing and retailing programmes more effectively.'¹⁵ The 1995 report was based on 900 interviews carried on a house-to-house basis. The results were weighted to 'form a precise match with the known population according to a number of factors,' these include 'basic demographics (eg age, sex grade)

and also household composition parameters.¹⁶ To set this data in context, it was compared with the social makeup of the population as identified by the National Readership Survey carried out in 1987. Specifically with regard to class (grade), the 1996 B.M.L. survey sought to provide a representative sample of the book buying public which was proportional with national demographic factors set out by the National Readership survey.¹⁷

The survey interviewed some forty-two per cent of respondents who were middle class and fifty-seven per cent of whom were working class.¹⁸ This differs slightly with the 1980 national survey which Bradley refers to, but this change is not unexpected given the deindustrialization during the 1980s and which destroyed many of the working-class jobs included in the 1980 survey. What is significant is the extent to which the B.M.L. report, exactly like Bradley, created the middle-class/working-class distinction based around C1 and C2. Throughout its verbal analysis of the statistical data the report bunches the six class strata in exactly the same way, with the assumption that readers know A, B and C1 represent the middle-class, C2, D and E the working-class.

The B.M.L. report discloses the class composition of the British book-buying public, or more accurately in light of its findings, the largely middle-class book-buying public. This class 'weighting' is emphasised in a number of ways. It finds that the middle classes (AB and C1) bought fifty-seven per cent of all new books, despite comprising forty-two per cent of the survey's respondents.¹⁹ The working class (C2 D and E) bought the remaining forty-four per cent of new books and made up fifty-seven per cent of the sample. It also found that 'ABC1s are more keen purchasers.'²⁰ As the report implies, this suggests that the heaviest buyers, purchasing sixteen or more books annually and including the 'Megabuyers', are even more likely to be middle class. For example, classes A and B, who make up eighteen per cent of the sample make up twenty-eight per cent of these heavy buyers, while classes D and E who make up thirty per cent of the sample constitute twenty per cent. As regards second-hand books, this weighting becomes even more pronounced and the report noted that:

Penetration - that is the percentage of any demographic group who buy second-hand books - follows a fairly predictable pattern...incidence increasing with social grade, and with over half of all heavy new book buyers buying second-hand as well.²¹

In its analysis of library ticket ownership the same middle class emphasis can be observed, and the report comments that, 'ownership rises noticeably with social grade.'²²

In its summary the 1995 report underlines a demographic profile of the most significant book-buying group: 'women, those aged 25-44, ABC1s...those living in the South and (to a lesser extent) the 'better-educated.'²³ Interestingly, the report also draws attention to a regional cultural difference in the number of books bought caused, it insists, not only by the regional differences in class composition which are noted by Bradley.²⁴ This suggests that a 'North - South' cultural split also exists and overlays more general factors such as social class, in the composition of the British book-buying public.

The B.M.L. report adds great substance to claims that the contemporary British book-buying public is predominantly middle-class. It also cautions against arguments that the British reader has become far more 'socially hybrid' in the post-war period and which are put forward by Connor.²⁵ Nevertheless, analysis of the B.M.L. report also indicates that this middle-class bias, or weighting, among consumers is a predominance, rather than any outright domination.

I put this research finding to Barbara Boote, an editor at the publishers Little Brown, and she commented 'I agree with your point about class, though books sold at Smiths' and stations are often sold to Ds and Es.'²⁶ The last clause of her sentence provides an extra clue about the relevance of class as regards book consumption in Britain because it suggests a form of spatial market segregation which might reinforce, and overlap, the class divisions which I have been describing.

The idea of a bookshop carries an 'exclusive' element, although not in an intrinsically pejorative sense. The trade acronym C.T.N. (Confectioners, Tobacconist, Newsagent) is an important example, as are supermarkets, of retail locations where books are not the main source of income, and bookselling is not the main preoccupation of counter staff. In such environs it is not clear if the retailer 'sells' books in any active sense or simply offers them as an additional product for customers who are shopping for their weekly food, buying tobacco, or purchasing a newspaper. Making this distinction is important because the bookshop and street-corner newsagent are very different retail environments and, consequently, they are likely to be frequented by consumers with different cultural attitudes and values towards books. This is one of the main points of the B.M.L report. In its overview the report stated:

The profiles of people using the various types of bookshop (bookshops, books and stationery and bargain book stores) are fairly similar, while users of *C.T.N.*'s are younger and more downmarket, and supermarket buyers are mothers who tend to buy a lot of books overall.²⁷

In light of the report's use of class, 'downmarket' can only be construed as a euphemism for working class. It would be premature, without further research, to claim that generic mass-market fiction which is normally sold at C.T.N.'s and supermarkets, is usually purchased by individuals from working-class backgrounds. Boote however, contends that bookshops have become 'very snooty' towards 'A' format commercial fiction because 'they tend to feel they can't sell large numbers,' and points out that this has been a 'change of attitude in the last five years.'²⁸ This suggests that new commercial considerations by the market, in this case bookshops, might reinforce already existing social faultlines like class, and which run through literary culture in Britain.

This argument is reemphasised when considered in light of my analysis of 'My Generation' and theoretical accounts of publishing. As I set out in Chapter Four, Williams draws attention to the significant symmetries, as well as asymmetries, between social class and organisation of the cultural

market. Furthermore, his account also raises the important theoretical question of how dominant and subordinate cultural relations are reproduced; an issue which has also been central to the work of Pierre Bourdieu, and which has also been central to calls for a return to the concept of reproduction in cultural studies.²⁹ Literary consumption, and literary culture more generally, might be seen as areas where this reproduction is cemented, or politically disrupted - a point I take up in my Conclusion.

Endnotes

- 1 Billington, p. 118, original italics.
- 2 Feather, p. 219.
- 3 Yiannis Gabriel and Tim Lang, *The Unmanageable Consumer: Contemporary Consumption and Its Fragmentations* (London: SAGE, 1995), p. 5.
- 4 Hoggart, pp. 207 - 212.
- 5 Alex Hamilton, 'Top Hundred Chart Of 1993: Paperback Fast sellers', *Writers and Artists Yearbook* (London: A and C Black, 1995), p. 255.
- 6 Yiannis Gabriel and Tim Lang, *The Unmanageable Consumer: Contemporary Consumption and Its Fragmentations* (London: SAGE, 1995), p. 19.
- 7 B. M. L., p. 3.
- 8 Reported in: Mike Ellison, 'Britons Have The Write Stuff, Poll Shows', *The Guardian*, 22 October 1994: p. 11.
- 9 Alex Hamilton, 'Top Hundred Chart Of 1993: Paperback Fast sellers', *Writers and Artists Yearbook* (London: A and C Black, 1995), p. 256.
- 10 Leonard Jackson, *The Poverty Of Structuralism: Literature and Structuralist Theory* (London: Macmillan, 1991), p. 255.
- 11 B.M.L, p. 5.
- 12 Taken from: Ian Bradley, *The English Middle-Classes Are Alive and Kicking* (London: William Collins, 1982), p. 26.
- 13 Ian Bradley, *The English Middle-Classes Are Alive and Kicking* (London: William Collins, 1982), p. 26.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 B.M.L., p. 1.
- 16 B.M.L, p. 62.
- 17 JICNARS National Readership Survey, undertaken December - January 1987. More detail on this survey's use of social grading is given in the originally titled: *Social Grading In The National Readership Survey* (London: JICNARS, 1988).
- 18 B. M. L., p. 25.
- 19 B. M. L., p. 25.
- 20 B. M. L., p. 26.
- 21 B. M. L., p. 29.
- 22 B. M. L., p. 29.
- 23 B. M. L., p. 26.
- 24 Ian Bradley, *The English Middle-Classes Are Alive and Kicking* (London: William Collins, 1982), p. 35.
- 25 Steven Connor, *The English Novel In History: 1950 - 1995* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 35.
- 26 Barbara Boote, personal letter from, November 1996.
- 27 B. M. L., p. 3.

²⁸ Barbara Boote, personal letter from, November 1996.

²⁹ See Milner, pp. 83 - 85. He uses the term 'reproduction' alongside 'print capitalism' when analysing the commodity relations of print. Milner aims, and in my opinion succeeds, in setting-out the basis for an effective approach to cultural production. He sees such an approach as central to what he describes as an 'immodest' future cultural studies.

Glossary Of Key Terms

Most of the terms, labels and concepts used in contemporary literary criticism are the subject of debate. It is also the case that following sometimes complex debates about critical terms tends to interrupt the essential task of seeing whether they actually apply to the fictional writings under consideration: eyes can tire, concentration wanders, boredom set in. The following Glossary is intended to overcome this potential problem while also offering a more extended consideration and definition of key critical terms like postmodernism and realism. I have also taken this opportunity to discuss Pierre Bourdieu's writings because, it seems to me, they are particularly dense in terms of theoretical vocabulary. This Glossary was suggested by Professor Nicholas Zurbrugg, De Montfort University and Roger Bromley, Nottingham Trent University. I would like to thank both for their constructive criticism.

Academic Criticism/Commercial Criticism: Definitions

By commercial criticism I mean that which is usually undertaken for payment and which appears in non-academic magazines or journals. Accordingly, I define academic criticism as that which is not usually published, undertaken or presented for commercial reasons, but rather with the aim of commenting upon the success or otherwise of attempts at scholarly enquiry. Academic criticism is primarily aimed at a specialist academic audience and presented at, or under the auspices of, an educational institution.

As the above suggests hard, clear divisions between academic and between commercial criticism are difficult to make. The whole distinction between either furthering knowledge or entertaining an audience/readers for a commercial fee, is difficult to be absolute about. Furthermore, as Gross points out with regard to literary criticism, the post-war period has arguably seen an increasing blurring of this boundary between academic and commercial spheres. He contends that this increasing professionalisation and institutionalisation of criticism has marginalizing the independent critic and comments: 'In a world which favours experts and specialists, this

means that the critic is increasingly liable to be dismissed as a dilettante or resented as a trespasser' (p.320).

If Gross is correct then the distinction between academic and between commercial criticism would seem increasingly irrelevant, but it is significant that any argument to this effect would still, even if only in a conceptual sense, have to depend upon a definition of what distinguished academic criticism from its commercial counterpart. Thus, also, philosophically tricky concepts such as 'furthering knowledge' would still inevitably have a role.

Arte poverta

By 'arte poverta' I assume (and can only assume) Adam Mars-Jones means a literature which revolves around descriptions of poverty and which explores issues around social or material deprivation. From the negative tone of Jones's article, I must infer that his use of the term is negative and that he is implying Kelman's texts use deprivation as a kind of (tiresome) artistic prop, their narratives wallowing in these images of poverty in an act of self-pity. For an interesting discussion of the term see the entry in John A. Walker's *Glossary of Art, Architecture and Design Since 1945* (London: Clive Bigley, 1973).

Bourdieu

It is virtually impossible to give a brief, yet comprehensive, overview of Bourdieu's writings because they are immensely ambitious and extremely complex. One labyrinthian sentence from *Distinction* (full title *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*), epitomises both of these qualities:

Endeavouring to reconstitute the units most homogeneous from the point of view of the condition of habitus, i.e., with respect to the elementary conditions of existence and the resultant conditionings, one can construct a space whose three fundamental dimensions are defined by volume of capital, compositions of capital, and change in these two properties over time (manifested by past and potential trajectory in social space) (p.114).

An obvious problem with such writings is their theoretical complexity, and to my mind Bourdieu overloads his overlong sentences with already difficult

concepts. Nevertheless three central concepts to his writings as a whole can be identified: field, habitus and capital.

Bourdieu's idea of habitus seeks to overcome the problem of either seeing social practices as constituting identity or as constituted for individuals, (or as Bourdieu sometimes calls them in *Distinction* 'agents' (pp. 101, 110). He comments, for example, 'Individuals do not move about in social space in a random way, partly because they are subject to the forces which structure this space' (p. 110) and describes his work as an attempt to understand this structure by establishing a 'science of taste and of cultural consumption' (p.6) which:

needs to abolish the sacred frontier which makes legitimate culture a separate universe, in order to discover the intelligible relations which unite apparently incommensurate 'choices', such as preferences in music and food, painting and sport, literature and hairstyle (p.6).

Habitus is a way of conceptualising how apparently 'natural' choices and dispositions towards action are, in fact, a product of 'the internalisation of the structure of social space' (p. 175). The realm of this internalised social space is dubbed habitus by Bourdieu.

It is in this vein that *Distinction* analyses eating habits in terms of their relation to a certain gendered habitus and life-style:

Eating habits, especially when represented solely by the produce consumed cannot of course be considered independently of the whole life-style... A taste for elaborate casserole dishes... which demand a big investment of time and interests is linked to a traditional conception of a women's role (p.185).

On such occasions Bourdieu's use of habitus borders on the role usually reserved for ideology. Habitus however, has a wider rubric than ideology alone in Bourdieu's work. In their editorial introduction to a collection of critical articles focusing upon his writings, Calhoun, Li Puma and Postone focus on the expansive qualities of habitus commenting: 'the habitus is the

dynamic intersection of structure and action, society and the individual' (p.4). 'The notion,' they add, 'enables Bourdieu to analyse the behaviour of agents as objectively coordinated and regular without being the product of rules on the one hand, or conscious rationality on the other' (p.4).

Capital in Bourdieu's accounts stands, essentially, for a currency in power. The concept refers to the assets which individuals, families or larger social groups use 'with a view to improving their position in social space' (p.135). In a discussion of the French education system after 1945, this usage is clarified when Bourdieu argues that upper bourgeois class used academic qualifications in its bid to 'maintain the relative scarcity of qualification and consequently their high position within the class structure' (p.133). As he emphasises in *Distinction* capital can be of the economic, educational or cultural form and individuals, families, or social groups, via 'reconversion strategies', frequently, according to his account, convert capital 'held in one form to another' (p.125) in their bids to maximise its social usefulness. Of the wider social role played by the 'business bourgeoisie' in the educational system of post-war France, Bourdieu comments: 'The reconversion of economic capital into educational capital is one of the strategies which enable the business bourgeoisie to maintain the position of some or all of its heirs' (p.137). Capital then, according to this account, is instrumental in reproducing inequality across generations.

Field is the dimensional framework within which these strategies (and inequalities) are played out and fields are zones which mark and define where individuals are within social space. They are a way of conceptualising the places at which the internalised social space (the habitus) of an individual and a range of wider possible social positions, interact. Bourdieu's concept is clarified when he refers, in *Distinction*, to the question of taste, specifically how cultural production always manages to accommodate and cater for the potentially vast array of individual tastes and of how both always manage to 'exhibit a quasi-miraculous correspondence.' (p.231) The question of how supply and demand relate within the cultural market, contends Bourdieu, is best understood by seeing the 'field of production' and the 'field of socially produces tastes' (p.231) as

supporting each other:

The producers are led by the logic of competition with other producers and by the specific interests linked to their position in the field of production (and therefore by the habitus which have led them to that position) to produce distinct products which meet the different cultural interests which the consumers owe to their class conditions and position, thereby offering them a real possibility of being satisfied. In short, if, as they say, 'There is something for everyone'...this is not the result of intentional design but of the meeting between two systems of difference (pp.231-232).

It is this, he argues, which 'guarantees objective orchestration' between the field of production and between the field of consumption (p.232).

In this thesis I refer chiefly to *Distinction* among Bourdieu's writings and in this text his central argument is that: 'art and cultural consumption are predisposed consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfil a social function of legitimating social differences.' (p.7) To support his case he not only sets out his concepts of habitus, capital and field but also embarks in *Distinction* upon a massive explication of how his theories operate across, and relate to, a huge variety of topics, using surveys and statistical analyses concerning everything from 'Variations in entertaining' (p.198), to the relationship between 'Permissiveness and political preference' (p.423). The result is an occasionally scatological, but always fascinating, vast ethnography of France during the 1970s.

Cairns Craig

Cairns Craig argues that Kelman has managed to 'fuse together' Scottish working-class language: 'with his own narrative voice so that the distinction between the language of narration and the language of dialogue is dissolved' (p.102). He adds, 'In particular what is characteristic of Kelman's style is the fusion of the spoken with the written, so that the narrative voice itself can take on the characteristics of a speaking voice' (p.103). About the absence of punctuated dialogue within Kelman's texts, Craig cogently argues that this is intended visually 'to resist that moment of arrest in which

the reader switches between the narrative voice of the text and the represented speech of a character' (p.103).

This last point is percipient: in my experience readers do not even notice that dialogue is without punctuation in Kelman's novels. Nor do they have problems in distinguishing between a character speaking and the narrative voice. Indeed, when the absence of speech punctuation is pointed out, most comment that they flow 'very naturally' between character voice and between narrative voice. Although not conclusive this indicates that Craig is correct in his analysis of this stylistic innovation.

Critics Draw On

While this provides a rich base for academic study and reference it can tend to drown appreciation of Kelman's novels and short stories in an ocean of reference. Rather than asking if, how, and to what extent, they offer readers an original view of, for example, contemporary life in urban (working-class) marginalised communities, the critic, instead, discusses how Kelman's writings are like those by Emile Zola or Shakespeare. An inevitable consequence is that novels like *A Disaffection* or *The Busconductor Hines* tend to be allowed no artistic validity outside of their likeness to literature by canonised authors.

During this thesis, therefore, I try to acknowledge that fictional writings by Banks and Kelman have a range of possible literary precedents without allowing this reference to dominate my analysis and discussion.

Critics Tended to Focus

For example Malcolm Bradbury in *The Modern British Novel* praises Kelman arguing that he has:

brought an experimental stream-of-consciousness vernacular to working-class Scots life (*The Busconductor Hines* 1983 (sic) and above all *A Disaffection* 1989) (p. 415).

The addition 'above all' and wrong publication date given for *The Busconductor Hines* (it was first published in 1984 not 1983), are both

indicative of which novel Bradbury refers to and wishes to recommend to his readers.

It is further significant that Kasia Boddy, in an otherwise unusually perceptive account of the contemporary literature of Scotland, ('Scotland' Kasia Boddy, *The Oxford Guide To Contemporary Writing*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996: pp. 361 -367), follows this trend and argues that *A Disaffection* is Kelman's 'most complete account' of 'the creative quest' for 'an authentic voice' which she sees as central to his writings and important within Scots writings more generally (p. 370). It is predictable, and for me disappointing, that she then goes on to focus upon *A Disaffection* (like most other critics) as support for her arguments about the importance of Kelman's writings generally.

Central Historic Characteristic of The Novel, 'Moving The Goalposts' and A Definition of The Thriller

The unfinished, flexible and dynamic nature of the novel is something which has been noted by critics. As Jeremy Hawthorn in his guide *Studying The Novel* notes: 'From its first appearance in the world the novel is associated with movement and travel - and in a more general sense with mobility' (p. 38) and he also argues that, 'One of the things which sets the novel part from many other literary genres is its ability to incorporate the most disparate elements from human life and experience in itself' (p.18). Andrzej Gasiorek in *Post-War British Fiction: Realism and After*, outlines the battles 'from the 1940s to the 1960s' between groups of writers and intellectuals over the 'future' of the form (p.4). He comments: 'I am urging the view that the novel is a heterogeneous and mutable genre which undermines its earlier forms in an ongoing search for new ways of engaging with a historically changing social reality' (p.8).

In his study *The Modern British Novel*, Malcolm Bradbury provides a more evocative summation of the novel:

The word 'novel' - the term itself suggests - has always described a loose and baggy monster, a form of fictional prose narrative that contains infinite variety, many different genres.

from reportage and social history to fantasy and romance, and reaches from serious exploration of the narrative frontiers to popular gratification and endless generic repetition (p. x).

I would, however, urge caution at the idea of infinite variety; great variety yes, but surely not infinite. Mikhail Bakhtin's contribution to contemporary literary criticism has done much to popularise this view of the genre.

Bakhtin, famously, defines the novel as a genre without a canon: a genre which indeed epitomises social and linguistic diversity. 'The novel' he comments, 'can be defined as a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even a diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organised' (p.114). He goes on to emphasise the disruptive cultural and political potentials of the genre because its diversity underlines social and linguistic diversity and therefore evades monologic authority. 'The novelist' says Bakhtin, 'does not acknowledge any unitary, singular, naively (or conditionally) indisputable or sacrosanct language' (*The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, Voloshinov*. Ed and trans. Pam Morris, London: Edward Arnold, 1994, p.116).

Of Bakhtin's analysis, Gasiorek comments:

...because it is associated with 'low' parodic-travestying literatures that ridicule 'high' culture and undermine the language of hegemonic groups, it becomes a transgressive, anti-canonic form that discloses society's stratified and conflictual nature (p. 8).

From this view Banks's novels, I suggest, can be seen - particularly a novel like *Walking on Glass* - to exploit the politically disruptive, bastardising and dynamic nature of the novel itself, to which Bakhtin and others draw attention. Indeed, when I observe that Banks's novels 'move the generic goalposts', I mean that they introduce elements from a recognisable novel genre, such as the thriller, and then in the course of their narrative go on to alter/confuse/subvert/make problematic these generic characteristics. This can be illustrated by referring to *Complicity*'s relationship with the thriller.

By thriller I refer, throughout this thesis, to Palmer's analysis of the genre in which he identifies three key conventions:

1. Thriller suspense consists of experiencing everything from the point of view of the hero
2. The hero is distinguished from the other characters by his professionalism and his success.
3. The hero undertakes to solve a heinous, mysterious crime which is a major threat to the social order.
(p.90)

Significantly, Palmer dubs these 'dogmatic propositions' and indicates, 'This does not mean that these are the only features of thrillers' but rather that 'they are the most important, dominant ones' (p.90).

This caution increases the effectiveness of Palmer's analysis of the thriller, genre because - as he shows with his overview of Frederick Forsyth's *The Day of the Jackal* - these 'ideal' archetypal thriller features are appropriated by new, emerging genre or sub-genre which can be seen to arise 'out of certain features of the old' but which, according to Palmer, also 'operate certain displacements at the same time' (p.91). *The Day of the Jackal* is analysed by him in this vein and *Complicity* can also be interpreted thus.

Complicity starts by appearing to be a thriller and readers' expectations that it is one are encouraged by using common conventions within the genre, such as positioning Colley within the narrative as the potential 'hero who undertakes to solve a heinous, mysterious set of crime(s)' which are 'a major threat to the social order.'

Crucially *Complicity* though, goes on to challenge its readers' expectations which it has itself helped to set up. Readers' learn that Colley (the hero) has been indirectly responsible for the 'heinous crimes' perpetrated throughout its narrative. Through this his hero status is made ironic. Further, Colley's ideological confrontation with Andy's terrorism and the their extended

discussions about political action in the alleged 'New World Order' of the 1990s, through which they explore some of the ethical complexity behind radical politics in contemporary western societies, are inconclusive.

Colley thereby fails another key criteria of the thriller as identified by Palmer: 'the hero is distinguished from the other characters by his professionalism and his success.' Colley fails to stop Andy's murderous spree, or even persuade him to reflect ethically upon his actions. After fruitless debates about whether direct political action is better than peaceful political protest and opposition Colley gives up his attempt to argue against Andy:

'I don't think there's any point trying to argue with you, is there, Andy?

'No, you're probably right,' Andy says, suddenly all cheery decisiveness (p.303).

Colley's 'professionalism' is shown via his reflections upon the Gulf War, to be hollow and have utterly failed. He describes how the whole experience of the conflict made him feel 'humbled, scaled, down-sized' (p.290).

Complicity therefore relies upon certain key thriller features, such as an narrative quest to solve a set of mysterious crimes which threaten the social order and the pleasurable suspense entailed by this narrative device, but it also, in ways I have outlined, deviates significantly from other key thriller characteristics and operates out of certain ideological and stylistic displacements.

Jeremy Hawthorn contends that 'Every novel contains something which is unique to itself, any significant novel (and some much more than others) challenges the expectations of readers to a certain extent' (p.53). Hawthorn's use of 'significant' can, I suggest, be seen as a (less problematic) partial substitute for 'good' or 'original' and following this criteria Banks's novels generally can, at the very least, be seen as significant among contemporary British fiction.

Key to their status as original and enjoyable texts is their exploitation of the novel's capability to be a medium for a thoroughly critical, subversive

oppositional and/or socialist, critique of the dominant discourses and which, using Gasiorsek's arguments, is part of an 'ongoing search for new ways of engaging with a historically changing social reality' (p.8). David Lodge, referring to Bakhtin's conception of the novel in his book *After Bakhtin: Essays on Fiction and Criticism*. (London: Routledge, 1990), echoes this view of the relationship between generic originality and social or political critique. He comments:

There is an indissoluble link in Bakhtin's theory between the linguistic variety of prose fictions which he calls heteroglossia, and its cultural function as a continuous critique of all repressive, authoritarian one-eyed ideologies. As soon as you allow a variety of discourses into a textual space - vulgar discourses as well as polite ones, vernacular as well as literary, oral as well as written - you establish a resistance... to the dominance of any one discourse (p.22).

As I argue in Chapter 2, this applies to Banks's novels in two ways: First, in the sense that novels like *Complicity*, *The Bridge* and *Walking on Glass*, intermingle, cannibalise and bastardise recognisable genres. Changing the generic goalposts for readers and challenging their literary expectations are products of this subversive strategy. Secondly, and related to the first sense, Banks exploits the political opportunities offered by this process. This can be shown from a very brief, example.

In *The Bridge*, the 'Barbarian's' narrative is a satire upon heroic or high genres. The contrast between the linguistic register of the Barbarian's 'low' Scots and between his familiar's grammatically and phonologically perfect English, can be 'read' as making a subversive political point about social and linguistic divisions within the Union: its social and linguistic inequalities. Indeed, Lennox in his narrative stream makes reference to the 1979 failed Scottish vote for devolution, or 'The Fabulous Make-Your-Mind-Up Referendum' which was 'effectively pochled - rigged in English' (p.239). From this viewpoint the Barbarian narrative might, further, be seen as a political affirmation of a British heteroglossia in the face of an English monologic national domination since 1706: the implication being that there is no Union (Union implying, in some sense, a harmonious 'coming

together'), but instead a historical domination by the English state and its class allies which has been poached to look like democratic unity.

Cult Literature

In his fascinating examination of pulp and popular literature, Clive Bloom suggests, albeit indirectly, a definition of cult literary production and cult literature: 'As readers will see, I delineate not just a history of that underclass of literary production usually known as pulp, but I also give some hints as to the wider context of pulp aesthetics or trash art with examples from further afield' (p.5).

He continues:

'Popular' here does not mean merely common and much of my argument is taken up with writers and books neither commonly read nor bestsellers, but nevertheless determinedly popular by definitions concerned with market forces, mass reading habits and education, class divisions and attitudes at once political, social cultural and always aesthetic (p.5).

Following Bloom then, cult literature can be defined as that literature which, in some sense, belongs to an underclass or hidden sector of literary production. As Bloom argues, examples of cult literature frequently fall outside, or cut across, definitions connected with cultural consumption. As he contends, cult questions the widespread assumption that popular literature is partly defined as that which is widely read, but I add one note of caution. It is possible to imagine a cult text which is anti-populist in orientation, even elitist, but which has a dedicated, energetic following among a small group of collectors, connoisseurs and fans. In this vein Hitler's *Mein Kampf* (Munich 1925 - 1928), has currently, no doubt, a cult following among Neo-Nazis and fascists, but would not today be thought of as popular in any other circles.

Cult, therefore, has potential limits to its status as popular literature. As my above example suggests one consideration is how that literature functions politically and ideologically when in contact with its readers. An observation arising from my analysis is that the term popular, to some extent or other,

also needs to be defined through reference to ideology and other political concepts.

Distinction Between Popular and Serious Culture.

Janice Radway, for example, in her analysis of the American Book-of-the-Month Club describes a distinction between 'serious authoritative culture' and between 'trivial culture' which 'has traditionally been dismissed by Western patriarchal culture as unworthy of serious recognition.' (p. 525) She further argues that this is a 'fundamental hierarchical division reinforcing a distinction between work and play, knowledge and ignorance, culture and entertainment.' (p. 525)

John Fiske in his examination of popular culture echoes Radway's analysis in terms of discrimination and of divisions between popular and institutionalised domains of taste:

Popular discrimination is... quite different from the aesthetic discrimination valued so highly by the bourgeoisie and institutionalised so effectively by the critical industry (p. 30).

About the popular domain he comments:

'Quality' - a word so beloved of the bourgeoisie because it universalises the class specificity of its own art forms and cultural tastes - is irrelevant here (p.130).

Serious, institutionalised culture, argues Fiske, relies upon maintaining this division for its integrity and claim to universality.

It might be argued that a (post-modernist?) flattening of hierarchies is currently taking place and confusing these divisions. Clive Bloom in his book *Cult Fiction: Popular Reading and Pulp Theory* London: Macmillan, 1996, makes this argument. He contends that previously popular 'trashy' cult artifacts and sensibilities, like the film *Faster Pussycat! Kill! Kill!*, directed by Russ Meyer, have become the subject of serious academic study. He further detects a 'crisis' in popular writing and argues that

'supposedly serious writers' now 'themselves stalk the popular imagination for their subject matter' (p. 237). Bloom argues that the taboo divisions between 'low' popular art and 'high' elite art are, more generally, being confused at the current time. He comments that consequently: 'Any requiem for pulp culture will inevitably also be the requiem for the old high literary culture that defined itself as the implacable enemy' (p. 221). Banks's novels might be seen as indicative, in their subversive intermixing of the serious and humorous, high literary and low popular genres, of this trend whereby according to Bloom, the 'language of culture uneasily shifts' (p.233).

Bloom's analysis of how more 'serious' writers are raiding popular culture for their material has particular relevance to texts such as *The Wasp Factory*. This is especially so given Bloom's identification of key traits in this crossover literature: 'the psychopathic hero-villain' (Frank ??) 'libidinous violence, incest, dismemberment, Sadeian fantasy with a shopping list of broken taboos and of invented horrors' (p.237). This is an apt description of *The Wasp Factory*.

Feather

In a summary of the current state of British publishing Feather comments: 'there have indeed been great changes and yet much that is familiar remains and continues to be successful' (p. 225). He continues:

As it enters its sixth century, the British publishing industry may indeed see itself in a state of permanent crisis, but it is difficult to find a time over the last five hundred years when that would not have been true ...Yet the industry has faced the challenges which these crises presented. Expansion and innovation have been the solutions (p. 225).

This description of adaptation and continuity - as opposed to disruption or destruction - could also apply to the British class system. In this sense the emergence of new sub-groupings within classes could be seen as an adaptive response within the entire social organism fathered by capitalism.

Identity Crisis and Capitalist Rationality: One Interpretation

Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life*, together with John

Fiske's reading of de Certeau in *Understanding Popular Culture*, can enrich and substantiate my reading of writings by Banks and Kelman. In particular, arguments made by de Certeau and Fiske can help to illuminate the political import of the sense of isolation and crisis which frequently permeates Kelman's fiction. I give one brief example.

De Certeau's comments that the 'vast frameworks' of current State/capitalist rationality mean that:

the individual detaches himself from them without being able to escape them and can henceforth only try to outwit them, to pull tricks on them, to rediscover, within an electronicized and computerized megalopolis, the 'art' of the hunters and rural folk of earlier days. (p.xxvi)

He goes on, 'The fragmentation of the social fabric lends a political dimension to the problem of the subject.' (p. xxvi *The Practice of Everyday Life*) Sammy in *How Late, How Late it Was* can be seen as symptomatic of de Certeau's arguments. Sammy is forever trying to 'pull tricks' on the hegemonic forces seeking to contain and control his behaviour, 'the sodgers and the D.S.S.' In addition his blindness (caused, significantly, by these very same forces), is shown to create, in a more specific sense, this crisis of the subject as Sammy's incapacity throws him into a darkness filled with his own unnerving introspections:

So what Sammy was feeling was the opposite of the opposite, in other words he fucking was hemmed in man know what I'm saying, hemmed in; and it was gony get worse, afore it got better; that was a certainty, it was gony get worse. He needed to do better, he really needed to do better. His entire approach had to be changed. The whole set-up. Everything. (p. 133)

Sammy's personal crisis is shown here to be a profound one, entailing a whole shift in his identity, 'the whole set up', and requiring (ironically) a whole new set of strategies aimed to outwit the vast networks of the state. His 'solution', ironic because Kelman suggests that it is only a provisional one, is to move to England:

Fucking England man that was where he was going, definitely:
down some place like Margate or Scarborough, fucking
Bournemouth. Christ almighty. (p.291)

The addition 'Christ almighty' (p. 291), indicates Sammy's recognition that his decision is a tactical retreat, an all too temporary withdrawal from a no-win situation. Such strategies of managing domination; 'making do with what the system provides', have been analysed as key components of an 'oppositional' popular culture (the phrase is actually taken from John Fiske's reading of de Certeau's text *The Practice of Everyday Life*, see Fiske's *Understanding Popular Culture*, p. 25). John Fiske's analysis of 'the people' component of popular culture also discloses a powerful notion of a hegemonic block (see my section on Gramsci) because the people are seen not as a monolithic or essentialised entity but, rather, as a shifting alliance of (in the parlance that awful phrase current within British political discourse), 'non-stakeholders' within the rubric of the economic, social and political system. In *Understanding Popular Culture* Fiske comments:

'The people' is not a stable sociological category, it cannot be identified and subjected to empirical study, for it does not exist in objective reality. The people, the popular, the popular forces, are a shifting set of allegiances that cross all social categories; various individuals belong to different formations at different times, often moving between them quite fluidly. By 'the people', then, I mean this shifting set of social allegiances, which are described better in terms of people's felt collectivity than in terms of external sociological factors such as class, gender, age, race, religion or what have you. (p. 24)

Sammy could, I suggest, be seen as a potential representative of 'the people' as defined by Fiske. Kelman's characters, as I showed earlier, exist less as members of the working class, but rather as a member of a *potential* 'felt collectivity' of individuals (who also happen to be working class) because they are, despite the fragmentation of the social fabric, collectively, even if in isolation, facing the same hegemonic forces with common strategies of refusal, limited resistance and guerrilla warfare. Of such strategies Sammy comments 'These wee victories; ye've got to celebrate them. Otherwise ye forget ye've won them' (p.125). His comment indicates

that such provisional victories only exist, in a sense, when they are also testimony to the scale of the hegemonic forces which seek to prevent their very existence. It is only in the face of such overwhelming power that microscopic victories, 'He had decided: he was going for a fucking pint' (p. 125) have meaning, only Sammy's herculean endless struggles against 'the system' turn a few moment's of relaxation into a transgressive celebration.

This is a paradoxical situation of course which will only be ended when (and if) as Roger Bromley comments in his analysis of *How Late It Was, How Late* and Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting*, these 'critically distanced voices' translate their articulations into symphonies which speak 'against the grain of cultural power, not solutions, but processes and possibilities for the collective' (Roger Bromley, *Writing In The Margins: Particularity and Difference in Recent Scottish Writings*, Nottingham: Nottingham Trent University, dept. of Humanities, 1994). By representing such extreme social atomisation and crises of the self Kelman's texts therefore point towards a future collective: by pointing to a vacuum they are simultaneously hopeful that new political possibilities will emerge to rush in, filling an otherwise hopeless space. Such a political scenario is transcribed within their analysis of power.

Non-realistic genres

I simply refer, in negative, to those literary genres which do not ascribe to the 'aesthetic consensus' which Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth in *Realism and Consensus in the English Novel* identifies as the key part of realism as a literary/philosophical practice (see pp. ix-x of her account and my definition of 'realism' for further discussion).

Popular culture

In their introduction to their gigantic *Cultural Studies* collection Grossberg et al. define popular culture as: 'the everyday terrain of people and all the ways that cultural practices speak to, of and for their lives' (p.11). This is a very general definition of popular culture because it involves all cultural

practices which occur at an everyday level in the course of ordinary social interaction. Buried within this apparently simple definition, however, is a set of complex political assumptions current within cultural studies about, for example, the kinds of social and cultural relationships which capitalist society fosters and, crucially, why the everyday life of ordinary people deserve serious academic study.

John Fiske is more explicit in tackling this 'why' issue when, in his book *Understanding Popular Culture*, he comments:

Popular culture is made by the people at the interface between the products of the culture industries and everyday life. Popular culture is made by the people, not imposed upon them; it stems from within, from below, not from above (p. 25).

This is the definition to which I ascribe throughout my thesis. In it Fiske implies that popular culture potentially, holds, the seeds of a common oppositional political position - hence its importance. But Fiske, significantly, does not spell out who 'the people' are, for good political reasons which are frequently invoked within cultural studies.

Grossberg et al., for example, after defining popular culture, go on to argue that 'the people' cannot be defined along some single dimension of social difference' (p.11). Indeed, they contend that cultural studies, at its best, is properly careful about invoking "the people" in its own work and elsewhere' (p.11) in order to avoid using a potentially, patronising, over-general, or non-inclusive definition. Nevertheless, as they point out through reference to the writings of Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart, 'Cultural studies does, to be sure, have a commitment to disempowered populations' (p.12) and I would suggest that any politically effective concept of 'the people' needs, in some sense, to reflect this tradition otherwise it is likely to have no political or analytical content and end up being a kind of token radical gesture.

Following Grossberg et al. and Fiske, popular culture might be defined as that which is made by the people, that is, those who are the disempowered

within capitalist society, in their everyday interactions and out of the products and experiences offered by the culture industries. As my use of culture industries indicates, popular cultural artifacts are frequently, though not necessarily, consumed in large quantities and designed so to be.

Post-structuralism and post-modernism: Definitions

Jeremy Hawthorn in his book *A Concise Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory* describes post-structuralism as:

A term that is sometimes used interchangeably with DECONSTRUCTION while at other times being seen as a more general, umbrella term which describes a movement of which one important element is deconstruction (p.155).

In my thesis I take the second route because I believe that the literary method and philosophy known as deconstruction, particularly as practised by the French critic Jacques Derrida, is an important strand within post-structuralist thought but not its totality. This is the approach also taken by Alex Callicinos in his book *Against Postmodernism: A Marxist Critique* (London: Polity Press, 1989). In this Callicinos mentions Derrida - well known for developing deconstruction as a practice and philosophy - alongside other influential intellectuals who are not associated with deconstruction. He describes 'the post-structuralism of Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Giles Deluze' (p.10) and adds: 'Despite their many disagreements all three stressed the fragmentary, heterogeneous and plural character of reality' (p.10). For me this analysis captures the essence of post-structuralist thinking and also identifies a common bond between post-structuralism and post-modernism.

Throughout this thesis I adopt a sceptical attitude to post-structuralism, post-modernism and deconstruction. It is possible to advance the thesis, as does Callicinos, that all three schools of thought are simply 'theoretical constructs' (p.10) and only of interest insofar as they are 'symptomatic of the current mood of the Western intelligentsia' (p.10). Furthermore, it is also possible to object philosophically to the epistemic relativism inherent in

accounts which stress (if we follow Callicinos's summary) the fragmentary, heterogeneous and plural character of reality. This objection has partly underwritten a recent satirical episode.

In 1996 the cultural studies journal *Social Text* published 'Transgressing the Boundaries: Towards a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity.' The article was actually a hoax which 'set out to parody post-modernist beliefs (particularly post-modernists' use of scientific language)' (p.17) and was written by two physicists: Alan Sokal, professor of physics at New York University, and Jean Bricmont professor of theoretical physics at the University of Louvain, Belgium. In an interview with Harriet Swain for the *Times Higher Education Supplement*, (July 10 1998, p.17), Sokal and Bricmont outlined how one of their aims was to attack the 'confusion of thought' they describe as belonging to subjectivist post-modernist thinking: that which, according to Swain, 'denies the existence of objective reality or down plays its practical relevance in favour of an emphasis on who is assessing that reality and how' (p.17). At a debate staged at the London School of Economics, Sokal, typically gave an uncompromising definition of objective reality by reference to the laws of physics. He commented:

No culture can change the laws of physics whatever they are.
We can have accurate or inaccurate views about the world of physics. But the world of physics is what it is, whether we believe it or not (quoted in Swain, p.17).

This may be so and both are, in my opinion, to be applauded for their humorous coup, if nothing else the events are funny. But as Jonathan Ree argues in a review of Sokal and Bricmont's recent book *Intellectual Impostures*, by stressing the strength of objective accounts of reality at the expense of post-modernist or post-structuralist subjectivism they run the risk of over-simplifying the division between objectivity and subjectivity. Ree comments: 'despite Sokal and Bricmont's hopeful hand-waving in the direction of a monolithic authority called "the philosophy of science", the conceptual situation cannot be as simple as they think' (*Times Higher Education Supplement*, July 10 1998, p.22).

This is my own position: while it is probable that post-modernism and post-structuralism are symptomatic of the mood of contemporary western intellectuals, then serious examination of this felt subjectivity, this mood, might have some value to the extent that it can provide insights into the psychic state of important social and cultural groups like the intelligentsia. Further, this also opens the way for a study of the way contemporary writers relate to this sensibility, what Ree dubs the 'post-modernist *Zeitgeist*' (p. 22 original italics). At the very least adopting a sceptical middle way: neither wholeheartedly accepting nor totally rejecting post-modernism and post-structuralism, offers, I suggest, a more productive outcome than outright assault or unqualified celebration.

Linda Hutcheon adopts this approach in her book *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History Theory, Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1988). She begins:

This study is neither a defence nor yet another denigration of the current enterprise we seem determined to call postmodernism. You will not find here any claims of radical revolutionary change or any apocalyptic views about the decline of the west under late capitalism (p. ix).

In effect summarising my own position, Hutcheon states, 'Rather than eulogise or ridicule what I have tried to do is study a current cultural phenomenon that exists, has attracted much public debate, and so deserves *critical* attention' (p. ix original italics).

She goes on to advance the thesis that a type of novel called historiographic metafiction, defined as 'well known and popular novels which are intensely reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages,' (p.5) might exemplify a post-modernist sensibility because the genre promotes 'a theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs' (p.5).

The chief advantage to Hutcheon's approach is in the way her account suggests how the post-modernist sensibility affecting the contemporary

western intelligentsia has also filtered through into artistic/literary practice. She argues that this is exemplified by novels such as *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie, or films like Terry Gilliam's *Brazil*.

According to *A Poetics of Postmodernism* a post-modernist literary/artistic practice is: 'self reflexive' (p.xii); 'works within conventions in order to subvert them' (p. 5); 'fundamentally contradictory' having 'a contradictory relationship to what we usually think of as our dominant liberal humanist culture' (p.5); seeks 'to challenge the empiricist, rationalist, humanist assumptions of our cultural system' (p.6); and 'deliberately undermines such principles as value, order, meaning, control and identity (p. 13). While it might, possibly, be objected that Hutcheon fails to offer systematic evidence that the dominant culture is underpinned by empiricist, rationalist, humanist assumptions, she is nevertheless careful to maintain a critical distance from the post-modernist sensibility she seeks to map. Hutcheon comments:

Wilfully contradictory, then, postmodern culture uses and abuses the conventions of discourse. It knows it cannot escape implication in economic (late capitalist) and ideological (liberal humanist) domination...There is no outside. All it can do is question from within (p.xiii).

By using 'it' to describe post-modernist culture, Hutcheon is signalling her distance from this culture, and at the end of *A Poetics of Postmodernism* she draws attention to the political and cultural limitations of post-modernism: 'Postmodernism may well be, as so many want to claim, the expression of a culture in crisis, but it is not in itself any revolutionary breakthrough. It is too contradictory, too wilfully compromised by that which it challenges' (p.230).

I concur with Hutcheon and draw on her analysis of a post-modernism throughout this thesis generally, but particularly when considering Banks's novels. If Banks's novels are seen as post-modernist in orientation then they seek to overcome the political limitation which Hutcheon outlines: if post-modernism is, as she suggests, too politically implicated in 'the current

system' to be truly oppositional then, at their best, Banks's novels use elements from a post-modern literary practice to try and imagine paths out of the current system and towards a politically better future. They use selected post-modernist techniques in order to further a Socialist, oppositional agenda, and by doing so, perhaps also offer a route around the wider political limitation which she identifies.

Rabelaisian

When referring to the word Rabelaisian, I use its vernacular rather than canonical form: Rabelaisian meaning disruptive and comic, rather than strictly pertaining to the writings of Francois Rabelais (c. 1495 - 1553).

Realism

Like post-modernism, realism is a term which is likely to provoke despair among those who wish for clarity of definition. Consequently, and as with post-modernism, realism is, I suggest, a blanket term for a number of qualities (such as a state of consciousness, a way of 'seeing'), which cut across disciplinary, social and cultural domains. Identifying some of the qualities associated with realism provides a better insight than any direct approach seeking to define 'what is' realism.

Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth in her study of the phenomena within the English novel provides an inventory of qualities that betoken (literary) realism: 'for example ...chronology, particularity, interiority, viewpoint and everyday subject matter' (p.xi) and also a 'conception of time and space as common, neutral media' (p.ix). She argues that 'fictional realism is an aesthetic form of consensus, its touchstone being the agreement between the various viewpoints made available by a text [and] to the extent that these viewpoints converge upon the "same" world' (p. x). Ermarth is careful to state that realism is not a universal, timeless concept but rather one which has arisen and evolved historically; this is my position. In my thesis I follow Ermath's analysis of realism, but want to add that it is the philosophical complexity of the concept, combined with its sheer dominance as a mode of perception, which makes it so hard to investigate and describe. Key, it seems to me, is Ermath's emphasis on the apprehension of a shared 'same world': this is

perhaps the core of realism, although what that 'same world' is will change constantly depending upon historical period; who or what is organising the consensus and for what reasons; the social location of the observer and their psychic or emotional state.

Romantic fiction

When referring to romantic fiction I rely upon Roberts and his outline: 'In post-war fiction, romances, more often termed romantic fiction are novels about love sex and adventure, written for a mass market and in many cases aimed particularly at women readers' (p.281). As he notes 'this kind of fiction has traditionally been given a low valuation by literary critics' (p. 281). I use the term without any such implication.

Banks's portrayal of Slater and Ffitch's heterosexual, but ironically incestuous, relationship in *Walking on Glass* can be seen as a sub-plot which satirises romantic fiction. Barbara Cartland's novel *A Runaway Star* (Severn House, London 2nd ed. 1987) might be seen as an example of the kind of novel which Banks is humorously targeting.

Scottishness

During this thesis the concept of Scottish writing (and also of a Scottish Literary Renaissance) is treated with caution. Liz Lochhead in her poem 'Bagpipe Muzak, Glasgow 1990' caustically outlines my central reservation about how a Scots national literary identity might be packaged, by whom, and with what political ramifications:

Where once they used to fear and pity
These days they glamorise and patronise our city-
Accentwise once they could hear bugger all
That was not low, glottal or guttural,
Now we've 'kudos' incident'ly
And the Patter's street-smart, strictly state-of-the-art,
And our oaths are user-friendly.
(Quoted in Boddy, p.362)

It is for these reasons that I personally prefer and prefer to use the more inclusive term British, rather than Scottish, literature within this thesis. By

'British' I mean all who reside in these isles, who choose a British nationality, and within which they can also, of course, be English, Scots, Welsh, Northern Irish, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Indian, Sri Lankan or/and have cultural links to any of the named/other nations too numerous to list. I take no prescriptive view on nationality, or what constitutes 'Britishness.' This said, it is frequently unrealistic to avoid use of the term Scots or Scottish and instead I use them cautiously: if only for the reason that by omission some readers might mistake this for an implication that Scotland has no unique set of literary traditions.

Unholy scramble

This can be seen within a wider process of canonisation and media popularisation of the term Scottish Literary Renaissance. Following an article by Kasia Boddy ('Scotland' Kasia Boddy, *The Oxford Guide To Contemporary Writing*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996: pp. 361 - 367), two key stages in this canon-forming process can be observed. She comments:

Familiarity with the fiction of Kelman and Gray made both publishers and public receptive to the work of Jeff Torrington (b.1935), Janice Galloway (b.1956) and Irvine Welsh (b.1958). And the success of the novelists brought many Scottish poets to the forefront (p.361).

Boddy's analysis suggests that first, individual writers and the idea of a Scottish Renaissance itself are established in the eyes of publishers, literary editors agents and readers; secondly, a subsequent generation of writers emerge to build upon the reputation of their immediate forebears. In this second stage the limits of the canon/movement are frequently extended or redefined.

Bourdieu's analysis of the art-market in *The Rules of Art* and his concept of cultural capital might have some bearing here. With respect to the discovery of artists (the term 'artist' being used in the widest sense and also to include writers), he comments in *The Rules of Art* that 'The discover's symbolic capital is inscribed in the relationship with the writers he or she supports' (p.

168).

Literary critics, in this interpretation, seek to extract maximum symbolic capital from their support of a specific writer. Further, following the kind of symbiotic relationship between consumer and producer which Bourdieu underlines above, readers might be seen in a similar light to critics. It *might* be argued, from this view, that some readers seek to bask in the reflected kudos in possessing and having read the 'latest', 'cutting edge', 'innovative' or 'scandalous' literature of the Scottish Renaissance. In flat, technical prose which is also rich with ironic, critical undercurrents, Bourdieu notes an endless migration of value within the art-market as current cutting edge artists become canonised orthodoxy. He outlines this dynamic in *The Rules of Art* :

The subversive action of the avante-garde, discrediting current conventions, meaning the norms of production and evaluation of the aesthetic orthodoxy, and making the products realised according to these norms seem superseded and outmoded, gets objective support from the *wearing out of the effect of consecrated works* (Original italics p.253).

Bourdieu goes on: 'Furthermore the most innovative works tend, *with time*, to produce their own audience by imposing their own structures through the effects of familiarisation' (original italics) p.253.

This analysis is a possible theoretical view upon the generational evolution of the Scottish Literary Renaissance which is also noted by Boddy, particularly her suggestion that the initial stage of the Scottish Renaissance 'made both publishers and public receptive' (p. 361) to writers within the second, subsequent, stage.

Working-class fiction

Pamela Fox's *Class Fictions: Shame and Resistance in the British Working-Class novel 1890 - 1945* (Durham and London: Duke University, Press, 1994), provides a good overview of some of the theoretical and scholarly difficulties connected with the study of working-class literature and culture.

(see especially pp. 1 - 30). Some are complex and fundamental. It is significant, for example, that the first chapter of Fox's book 'which lays the ground work for later discussions of individual literary texts' (p.27) begins by outlining debates about the composition of the working class itself in the post 1945 period. She remarks:

Dismay over the perceived breakdown in working-class cultural values caused by changes in the economy, the workplace and urban planning from the late 1950s onwards, created the sensationalised portrait of a gutted working class suffering from a 'loss of function' (p.28).

As this suggests, inevitably what 'we' as academics describe as working-class fiction/literature will depend upon our current notions of class and class agency. This also discloses that there is no 'outside' neutral discourse with which to further identify a working-class novel, poem or play, particularly if the researcher or academic has been socialised and lives within British society.

Fox's argument is that working-class literature can be characterised by the way in which it, paradoxically, rejects and affirms its class status at the same time in a 'reproduction resistance circuit' (p.3). She comments that working-class literary texts are often 'defiantly marked by [their] particular location within the social order' (p.2) and further argues that they 'proudly claim, and just as insistently deny, their own class specificity' (p.2.) Fox describes her book as an overall attempt to better understand this 'reproduction-resistance' circuit of 'pride and denial' (p. 3).

The notion of an identifiable (working-class) 'class specificity' to fictional texts (novels, short stories and poems) is for the purpose of this thesis, taken as a definition of working-class fiction. Indeed, exploring further this class specificity is one of my reasons for studying Kelman's texts.

Working-class reinvention of realism

Working-class realism refers, in this thesis, to both a socially specific literature (a literature written by, about, or for the working class - see my definition of working-class literature), and to the aesthetic consensus which

Elisabeth Deeds Ermath conceptualises in her study of realism (see my definition of realism).

Following Jeremy Hawthorn, I suggest that realism is an important literary practice within the history of the working-class novel, primarily because, as Hawthorn argues, 'this technique is designed to help us experience a working-class collectivity' (p. 46). As Hawthorn remarks with regard to Lewis Grassie Gibbon's novels *Gray Granite* (1934) and *A Scots Quair*, realism:

involves the reader is a process of collective sharing of attitudes: we feel as we read that we are part of the group that is thinking out its beliefs... We thus experience the ideology of the group from the inside while having it displayed in a matter that allows us to look at it more objectively (p. 149).

This, I think, encapsulates why realism, as a literary practice, has been politically important to the working class novel: it allows the author to communicate an ideological 'world view' from within working-class culture to readers. The political import of this is that readers, potentially, align themselves ideologically and politically with the interests of the working class as a whole, during and after reading the text. Furthermore, it speaks very directly to working class readers: it is their life and by speaking thus the narrative, arguably, offers itself as theirs. If however, working-class culture itself has fractured then collectivity is more difficult, even impossible, to convey to the reader via a realistic literary practice - there is no 'we' to describe.

I contend in Chapter Two, that these are the literary and political circumstances from which Kelman writes and the realism which his novels and short stories call upon, particularly in their minute attention to the detail of everyday life, therefore is an adaptation of the more usual realistic tradition within the working class novel to which Hawthorn refers. By emphasising the atomisation suffered by working class characters like Hines and Sammy, their 'I' rather than 'we' status, the political effect of Kelman's use of realism is, I suggest, to convey to readers how marginalisation operates in contemporary Britain and how it condemns a

large minority to social exclusion - see Chapter Five of my thesis for an exploration of this issue. This overall political thrust to Kelman's fictional writings is also, of course, critical of the capitalist system more generally. I give one example.

In 'The Bevel', a short story in Kelman's collection *Not Not While The Giro*, the setting is low-pay, exploitative, employment. The unnamed narrator is part of a work gang who are cleaning a chemically hazardous chlorine tank because 'its lining was being renewed' (p.40). Kelman indicates that their employer is less concerned for the safety/welfare of his workers than in finishing the contract on time. This is shown by the narrator's discovery that health and safety legislation is being ignored regarding the length of time he and his fellow workers are spending in the tank. 'I discovered,' the narrator tells the reader, 'that we were not supposed to stay longer than 30 minutes without at least having a quarter of an hour break out in the open' (p.41). This sets the scene for a subsequent industrial accident and builds up the narrative tension as the reader wonders who will be injured or killed and how. As the narrative makes clear this is low-pay, dangerous, non-unionised, insecure work where workers are suspicious about whether they will actually be paid. This last point is emphasised when the work-gang have a discussion about their wages:

Well no wonder, Sammy, sometimes he treats us as if we were the three stooges.

The boys right, said Chas. I notice he's not saying anything about the wages.

They'll be in his bloody car.

Aye and they'll stay there as long as possible, just in case we nick away for a pint or something (p.43).

A potentially lethal accident ensues and Williams, their supervisor; ironically the one who asks them to do a risky manoeuvre within the giant chlorine tank, is saved by the workers he does not trust:

Williams yelled, but he managed to twist and get half onto the edge of the platform, clinging there with his mouth gaping open. Joe and Chas were already to him and clutching his arms then me and Sammy were helping. When he got up onto the platform

he sat for a long time, until his breathing approached something more normal (p.47).

The way Kelman's fictional writings relate to realism is supported by Andrzej Gasiorek's *Post War British Fiction: Realism and After*. He analyses how a range of post-war British novelists have related to realism as a literary practice and philosophical standpoint. He begins: 'This book argues that the dichotomy between realism and experimentalism is misleading in the post-war context because numerous novelists have sought to transcend it in their writing' (p.17). Gasiorek contends that post-war British writers have taken realism into new domains and comments:

Several of the novelists discussed in this book have taken realism in new directions ...Their texts confront the difficulties entailed by the writer who seeks to represent social reality but grasps that any interpretation of it is in part constituted by the discourses at his or her disposal (p. 182).

He adds: 'Out of this tension between word and world emerges a wide range of new realisms' (p. 183).

My analysis of Kelman's adaptation of the realistic tradition can be seen in this light. Indeed Gasiorek devotes a chapter entitled 'After Socialist Realism' (pp. 71-82) which is concerned with how avowedly Socialist novelists have evolved or used realism (his examples being John Berger and Doris Lessing during the early part of her career).

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